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ARE MIRACLES CREDIBLE?

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ARE MIRACLES CREDIBLE?

BY THE REV

JOHN JAMES LIAS, M.A.,

VICAR OF ST. EDWARD'S, CAMBRIDGE, AND
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"There appear to be some who have very little attended either to Christianity or its evidence, and who reject Christianity with a scorn proportioned to their inattention, and yet are by no means without understanding in other matters."—BISHOP BUTLER.

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P R E F A C E .

THE present work does not profess to be an exhaustive statement of the case for miracles. All that can be done within such limits as those to which this volume is confined, is to give such an outline of the arguments as may serve to show on what considerations the defence of miracles rests. Great care has been taken to make the book of as popular a kind as the subject permits. Many, it is to be feared, have been deterred from the study of books on the evidences of religion by their dry and scholastic character. Composed, as the present treatise has been, in some haste, it is probable that some imperfections will be found. The scientific portions have, however, been submitted to the Rev. A. J. C. Allen, Fellow and Dean of St. Peter's College, Cambridge, to whom the author is indebted for several valuable suggestions.

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INTRODUCTION.

A GREAT deal is said about the "spread of scepticism" in the present day. But when examined carefully, the statements appear to be not a little exaggerated. More properly, we should say that the ever-flowing current of irreligion is running in new channels. It is unfortunately no new thing that the consistent disciples of Christ should be in a minority. They have been so from the beginning, and are so still. But whereas in one age irreligion shows itself in a readiness to accept the principles of Christianity and to excuse oneself from their application, in another the tendency is to dispute the principles themselves. In the present age, when men at least desire to be honest, they recoil from the inconsistency of the former course, and being unwilling to commit themselves to the consequences flowing from a full acceptance of Christ's religion, they boldly fix themselves on the latter horn of the dilemma, and question the truth of Christianity itself. It is not to be supposed that this rejection is in most cases the result of deep investigation. The honesty of many in this age is often but skin deep. They recoil from professing belief in a religion they are not prepared to practice; they see no objection to proclaiming their doubt of a religion whose credentials they have not examined. Thus the scepticism—

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for it does not amount to disbelief—of the present age is a vague, unsettled state of feeling; it contents itself with general impressions; it is satisfied if the views it adopts are “in the air,” as it is said. It is sufficient that such views are pretty generally expressed by “thinking men,” that they are commonly met with in newspapers and reviews. To go into the question thoroughly is too fatiguing. To study the deep books written by men of character and intellect on the side of Christianity is too serious a task. It is much more convenient for a man to re-echo the commonplaces he hears repeated around him, the more especially when he can gain by this a reputation for enlightenment and independence of thought.

But this peculiar form of temptation in modern society is a great snare to many who are earnest but impressionable. It is in order to prevent such from being led away by the prevailing tendencies of the age that the present series of handbooks have been planned. It is not supposed that any number of arguments can produce religion in one who has it not. It is only hoped that they may sometimes prevent one who has it from losing it. Religion is not, as some mistaken defenders of it have supposed, *founded* on reason. On the other hand, it is not, as some have tried to persuade us, *contrary* to reason, for if it were, it would be contrary to God. We are bidden to be able to “give a reason for the hope that is in us,” because reason, properly used, is a hand-maid to faith. The object of these treatises, then, is rather to remove difficulties in the way of really earnest-minded persons than to bring conviction to minds indifferent to religion. It is hoped that in some cases they may pave the way to a full consideration of the evidence for Christianity. In many others, where there is no time for such investigation, they may at least serve to show that the defenders of

our holy religion have something to say for themselves, and may thus cause a waverer to suspend his judgment, until time and experience and the discipline of life have rendered him better qualified to judge on a question so momentous.

The three points on which the tendency to doubt is most pronounced at the present time are the authenticity and inspiration of the books of Holy Scripture, the necessity of Christian dogma, and the credibility of the Bible miracles. On each of these three questions the crudest theories imaginable have at present, it must be confessed, the popular ear. The question with which we have to deal is the last of the three. No treatise is at present in existence which deals fully yet popularly with the subject. In many cases the question is only treated as part of a larger argument. In many others the work which deals with the question is too much encumbered with learning and philosophy for ordinary readers, who have but little time for the subject. And not a few of these treatises are somewhat unsatisfactory in themselves. Thus the best known, perhaps, of them all, the Bampton Lectures of the late Professor Mozley, are marred by a too slight acquaintance with the principles of physical science.* This has laid the writer open on some points to a telling retort from Professor Tyndall,† who, as is customary with writers of his school, fixes on the weak points of his adversary's argument, and leaves the rest, however forcible and masterly, entirely unnoticed. As it is unfortunately the fact that for one person who reads Professor Mozley's lectures

* Professor Mozley, moreover, does not undertake to give the particular evidence on which miracles are believed, but only to meet some objections supposed to be fatal to the possibility of their occurrence.

† *Fortnightly Review* for June 1, 1867.

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there are ten thousand who read the *Fortnightly Review*, it is not, perhaps, surprising that the opinions of Professor Tyndall should be widely circulated, and that a general impression should be produced, not merely that he had pierced some weak places in his adversary's armour, which is true enough, but that he had demolished Professor Mozley and Christianity into the bargain. It is hoped that those who can be persuaded to read this volume may find that this last is not altogether the case, and that they may not only be brought to feel themselves, but may lead others to feel, that more is to be said for Christianity than men of the world are willing to allow.

The plan of this work is as follows. It commences with a definition of the word to be discussed ; it next enumerates the various objections brought against miracles ; it proceeds to discuss (*a*) the possibility of, and (*b*) the evidence for, miracles. It next goes on to ask the reason why miracles have been worked, and why they have ceased to be worked ; and it concludes with showing the moral necessity for miracles, as based (*a*) upon the existence of a personal God, and (*b*) upon the character and complex constitution of man.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

THE definitions of the word miracle have been most various. And we shall see that here, as elsewhere, much of the controversy raised on the subject has been caused by the fact that the same word has been used by different persons in different senses. Thus Hume has defined a miracle as a "violation of the laws of nature." * Professor Mozley, † following a large number of writers who treated on this subject before physical science had reached its present development, defines a miracle as a "visible suspension of the order of Nature." ‡ The objection to these definitions is that they have led to a good deal of irrelevant discussion on the point whether an order or law of nature *can* be "violated" or "suspended." The truth is that no law of nature is demonstrably either violated or suspended by a miracle. Whether such violation or suspension be possible or not may fairly be discussed. But if the question be decided in the negative, it does not by any means, as some have supposed, settle the question in favour of the

* "Inquiry concerning the Human Understanding," Section x.

† "Bampton Lectures" for 1865.

‡ Professor Baden Powell ("Essays and Reviews," p. 109) gives a still more unfair definition. He says that it is asserted to be something at variance with nature and law. Such an assertion of course assumes the whole question under discussion. And Mr. Matthew Arnold states the

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impossibility of the miraculous. The miracle could occur just the same if the force were counteracted by another force, or the law overruled by a higher law. Dr. McCosh, therefore, has somewhere defined a miracle as a work wrought by a Divine power for a Divine purpose, by means beyond the reach of man.* This definition is far more correct than those which have been given, but perhaps it asserts too much when it refers to the "means" whereby a miracle is wrought. We are no judges whether in working a miracle God employs means, or whether it occurs directly by the fiat of His will. The introduction of the words "for a Divine Purpose," are, however, most important. If a miracle has no evidential force, it is a simple marvel and no more.† Perhaps, therefore, it might

matter thus. If, he says, he himself were to change the pen with which he was writing into a pen-wiper, he would, in the common opinion of mankind, "be entitled to affirm and to be believed in affirming, propositions the most palpably at war with common fact or experience" ("Literature and Dogma," p. 128). Nothing, as will hereafter be seen, could be more opposed to fact than this description of the Christian belief in miracles. No one believes on their authority "propositions at variance with common fact or experience." What is believed on their authority consists in propositions on points of fact which are *outside the range* of our ordinary experience.

* The definition in his book, "The Supernatural in Relation to the Natural," is different. "We would confine," he says, "the word Miracle to those events which were wrought in our world as a sign or proof of God making a supernatural interposition or Revelation to man." This is substantially the same as the one we have independently adopted in the text. Why we have left out the words "to man" will be seen in Chapter viii.

† "The greatest marvel or interruption of the order of nature, occurring by itself, proves nothing; but if it takes place in connexion with the word or act of a person, that coincidence proves design in the marvel, and makes it a miracle; and if that person professes to report a message

be better to describe a miracle as *an exception to the observed order of nature, brought about by God in order to reveal His will or purpose*. A special providence—a kindred subject, which it is proposed briefly to treat in these pages—may be defined as *such an overruling of the order of nature as tends to manifest to mankind God's personal care of His creatures*.

or revelation from heaven, the coincidence again of the miracle with the professed message from God proves design on the part of God to warrant and authorize the message." Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 7.

CHAPTER II.

WHY HAVE MIRACLES BEEN OBJECTED TO?

THE main ground on which objections have been raised to miracles is expressed in the language of Hume, who did but put in a definite and striking form the objections which had been raised by Woolston and others before him. He says "that no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish." Or, as Paley summarizes it yet more tersely; "it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but it is not contrary to experience that testimony should prove false." This principle has acquired fresh strength since Hume's time.* The discoveries which have been made during the present century have tended to show that Nature is governed by forces acting by certain definite and unvaried † "laws," as they are termed. That

* Hume's argument only goes so far as this ; that the testimony of the witnesses to our Lord's miracles is not deserving of so much credit as the argument to the contrary derived from the uniform course of Nature as observed by man.

† This term is preferable to that usually employed. The word "invariable," so often employed by reasoners on this subject, on both

is to say, that under similar circumstances these forces invariably produce similar results. Thus a conviction of a fixed and invariable order of Nature has grown and deepened, and the difficulty felt by certain minds, of the possibility of any departure from this order, has much increased. And so writers like the late Professor Baden Powell, have come to speak of miracles as "incredible intrinsically." It is no longer a matter of balance of probability, as it was with Hume. It is no longer, that is, a question whether experience or testimony be the safer guide in questions of fact, but it is affirmed to be so certain that Nature is governed by immutable laws that the assertion that on any occasion whatever the usual action of natural forces was suspended or interfered with in any way, must be rejected as not only improbable, but impossible from the very constitution of the visible universe.* I say the visible universe, because the philosopher, Spinoza, has confused the question very much by his definition of Nature. This he holds to comprehend "not only the

sides, is inaccurate, and therefore seriously misleading. To say that a law has not, so far as observation goes, been varied, is one thing : to say that it *cannot* be varied is quite another. Not only is this last a pure assumption, but it will be shown in the next chapter (p. 15) that it is an assumption contrary to fact.

* "I reject miracles, because everywhere I find law the constant mode of operation of an infinite God" (Theodore Parker). So Wegscheider, who regards miracles as "irreconcilable with the idea of an eternal God *consistent with Himself*." (See next chapter.) And J. S. Mill ("Logic," ii. 156) : "Whatever is contrary to a complete induction is incredible. . . . If we make our election to hold by the law, no amount of evidence whatever ought to persuade us that there has occurred anything in contradiction to it." It is easy to see what would become of scientific progress on these principles. A "law" would be proclaimed upon insufficient evidence, and those who accepted it would refuse to acknowledge any facts which conflicted with it.

material universe, but an infinity of other things" beside.* In this sense, no doubt he is perfectly right in contending that nothing happens contrary to Nature, for under this hypothesis Nature is identified with God, or at least with His government and laws as a whole. No one contends that miracles are a violation or suspension, or counter-action in any way of *that* order, but just the contrary.† Therefore Spinoza's objections to miracles may at once be set aside, as beside the question we have undertaken to discuss.‡

The objections to miracles on the grounds above alleged are strengthened by a consideration of human testimony generally. It is said that mankind are so foolish, so credulous, so greedy of marvellous tales, that any account

* "Tractatus Theologico-Politici, De Miraculis," Chap. vi., note :—"Me hic per Naturam non intelligere solam materiam, ejusque affectiones, sed praeter materiam, alia infinita."

† "If anything happened in nature at large repugnant to its universal laws, this would be equally repugnant to the decrees and intelligence of God" (Spinoza). But no one asserts that miracles are repugnant to the "universal laws" of "nature at large," defined as Spinoza defines nature. Spinoza might have studied the schoolmen to some advantage. Four hundred years before, Albertus Magnus had told him that if by nature was meant the first causes of things, God could not act at variance with these without denying Himself. But with regard to nature in the lower sense, creation might be said to be *against* it, as violating the fundamental principle of the visible world, that nothing comes into existence except from some previous existence of the same kind; that independent forces, such as those of the human will, might be said to be *beside* nature, while occurrences of the nature of miracles might be defined as *above* nature.

‡ Spinoza goes on to say that if a miracle *did* occur, it could teach us nothing about God. But here, again, no one contends that it would. It is not the miracle that teaches, it is the person who works it. The miracle only serves to show us Who authenticates his teaching.

which has the least spice of the marvellous is eagerly swallowed.* It is asserted, moreover, that the growth of intelligence is fatal to the belief in these marvels.† An “unbiassed, educated, well-informed individual,”‡ would, as a matter of course, in these days, reject any story involving the existence of the miraculous, or if the testimony were too strong to be doubted, he would be sure either that the event could be explained by natural laws already known, or by others hereafter to be discovered. Hume and other objectors mention in addition a number of pretended miracles in heathen, mediæval, and even in modern times, which the philosopher rejects, but which are declared to rest upon as good testimony as those mentioned in the Christian Scriptures. And it is further argued that even if this were not the case, no amount of testimony could reach the *cause* of the alleged miracles. They may have been only miracles relatively to the apprehension of the age, § or, in other words, Christ and His disciples might have been in possession of some knowledge of natural laws unknown to the rest of mankind, whereby they were able to pass themselves off before men as possessed of supernatural powers.

Hume's canon concerning miracles is re-stated by the late

* “The *avidum genus auricularum* (Lucretius), the gazing populace, receive greedily and without examination whatever soothes superstition and promotes wonder” (Hume, “Essay on Miracles”).

† Yet Christianity, so far from being hostile to intellectual progress, has been singularly favourable to it, as a comparison of the intellectual condition of the Christian nationalities with any non-Christian ones, present or past, will plainly show. Nor is the belief in miracles confined to the unintelligent or unscientific. Many of the most prominent men of science are believers in the miraculous. (See p. 65.)

‡ Professor Baden Powell, “Essays and Reviews,” p. 107.

§ This is Schleiermacher's theory.

John Stuart Mill in a very ingenious way, but a way which precludes all argument. He declares that what Hume says amounts to this, that no amount of evidence can prove a miracle to one who does not believe in a being or beings endowed with supernatural power.* But this is hardly Hume's case. He boldly denies the occurrence of miracles altogether. That miracles are no evidence to men who deny the fact of which they are evidence, may be conceded on all hands. It is hardly conceivable how any being possessed of supernatural power could demonstrate his existence to a being constituted as man is, without displaying that power by controlling the operations of Nature. But if a man is determined beforehand to deny the existence of the being who so makes his existence known, it is a mere truism to say that any manifestations whatever of his existence would be utterly useless in the case of such a person. This is no case of a reasonable objection to miracles. It is the absolute negation of reason in the matter. It is a determination to lay down axioms independently of all reason or evidence whatever. In point of fact, the statement amounts to this, that no amount of evidence can prove a miracle to one who is resolved not to believe it. With such persons no argument is attempted in these pages, because argument would be useless. We may discuss the compatibility of miracles with the known principles of natural science. We may endeavour to examine whether the evidence for them is sufficient to incline a rational man to believe that they have occurred. But to persons who say, No amount of evidence shall convince me that there exists a being who has power over Nature, nothing can be said, except this, that there is a bigotry of unbelief quite as blind and irrational, involving quite as thorough an abnegation of the

* "Mill's Logic," ii. 159.

highest faculties of the human mind, as can possibly be the case with the bigotry of superstition. We proceed then, in the following pages, to inquire whether the grounds on which objections to miracles have been based are sufficient not only to outweigh the testimony which is produced in their favour, but to induce us to set aside the other strong arguments whereby the Christian revelation is recommended to our notice.* Into those arguments we do not enter here. Even the question of the existence of a Personal God will not be more than touched upon in this Essay. We shall only assume that the existence of such a Being is not impossible. And this very moderate assumption being made, we shall proceed to show that if there be such a Being as the Christian's God, there is no reason whatever to suppose that He has *not* employed miracles as a means of making His Will known to men, and many very strong reasons indeed for supposing that He *has* done so.

* This point in the argument requires special attention. It is invariably evaded by objectors to Christianity. They persist in representing the point at issue as being simply whether the Scripture accounts of miracles are worthy of credence. The real point is, whether we are justified in rejecting the whole body of evidence for revealed religion, vast and varied as it is, simply on the ground that miracles are unusual, and, in all *ordinary* circumstances, incredible occurrences.

CHAPTER III.

CAN A MIRACLE HAPPEN? UNIFORMITY OF NATURE.

THE first objection which is raised against miracles is derived, as we have seen, from the presumption that there is an "universal, immutable natural order,"* which no power on earth or heaven can set aside. In the present chapter we shall confine ourselves strictly to this one point, reserving for the next the consideration of the causes which physical science has discovered for this uniformity, namely certain forces which have been proved to be constantly at work in Nature, according to certain unvaried laws of operation. We shall see hereafter that even though we confess that there are forces uniformly acting in obedience to certain invariable laws, we are not therefore necessarily compelled to admit that the course of Nature is uniform in consequence. The question we shall now ask is this. *Must* Nature necessarily be uniform? That is, first, Is there anything in the constitution of things which forbids any alteration of her order? And next, can any amount of observation establish the fact that no alteration of that ordinary course could by any possibility have occurred?

We will take the former question first. Is there anything in the constitution of things which forbids any alteration of the order of Nature? To this question we may answer emphatically, No. Concerning the laws of Nature at

* Professor Baden Powell, "Order of Nature," p. 224.

present existing, we have only discovered that they *are*. No one has ever pretended to prove that they *must be*.^{*} The assertion that the order of Nature is not only unvaried but invariable is one of those unproved assertions which every man of science in these times is carefully warned to avoid. Scientific discovery was at a standstill for centuries because men laid down *a priori* considerations which were to be adopted independently of all observation. Science began to advance from the moment when observation was held to be the necessary basis for all investigation. To observation alone men of science appeal. To observation, therefore, we must request them to confine themselves. If *one single fact* has occurred which seems to be above and beyond the operation of ordinary physical laws, the occurrence of that one single fact must be held, by all laws of scientific investigation, to render the existence of some force or forces outside the region of observed physical law at least probable, and to make it the duty of every scientific man to suspend his judgment on the point until it has been fully examined. If not merely one single fact, but a whole class of facts may be reasonably supposed to have occurred which indicate

* Spinoza has spoken as though the laws of Nature existed by some kind of necessity, as part of the Being of God, and some modern writers have followed him. But no one acquainted with the principles of physical science would suppose that there is any intrinsic impossibility that the laws of Nature should be other than they are. A considerable portion of Newton's "Principia" consists in the investigation of the orbits in which bodies would move if acted upon by forces following other laws than that of gravitation. The result is not an absurdity. And, therefore, we may perhaps be permitted to argue that even if there occurred a change in the law of force, as is suggested in p. 6, the results might not be so vast as some have supposed. But it is better to regard the matter from the point of view of Chap. iv., and regard Force and its laws as simply the manifestations of Will.

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the existence of these extra-physical laws, then the scientific man is still more strictly bound by the first principles of science to admit the possibility of unknown forces belonging to another region than that of physical science, whether to that of moral or of spiritual, or in other words, theological * order.

We proceed to ask whether it is correct to say that no amount of observation ought to induce us to believe that such alterations have ever occurred. And here we take leave to observe that the scientific world has just been acting upon a principle the direct opposite of this. Men of science have lately been engaged in a lively controversy on the question whether certain germs of minute organisms are self-evolved, or are produced from other germs. Now if there be one law which might fairly be assumed to be universal in Nature, it is the law that life is invariably evolved from life. If there be anything which might be held to be "intrinsically incredible," it is that the Creative Will or Force, or whatever it may be called, should be now continually interfering with the ordinary course of Nature by fresh creations, and that of the most minute and (in some senses at least) insignificant of its creatures. To admit the possibility of such occurrences would be to admit the miraculous upon a far vaster scale than Christianity or any other religion has ever proposed it to our acceptance, and without any of the reasons whereby religion is apt to

* Theology, a word much abused, means properly, *reasoning about God*. A "theological order" then, is an order in accordance with what human reason teaches about God. Such human reason, while it notes carefully the facts of the visible world which made known the being of God, does not by any means necessarily exclude the possibility that He has revealed His Will to man by processes beyond the sphere of that visible universe which we call "Nature,"

account for it. Men of science would therefore be justified, on the principles we have been discussing, in rejecting the theory as "intrinsically incredible." Yet what does Professor Tyndall, the great opponent of the views of Professor Mozley on this very question of miracles, do? Does he lay down the rule that no amount of evidence ought to be sufficient to induce him to accept a doctrine so contrary to the observed order of Nature as this fresh creation of life, as opposed to its evolution from existing creatures of the same type? No; he proceeds to a series of most carefully conducted experiments to show that this spontaneous generation may be proved experimentally to be contrary to fact.* We concede willingly that he thereby proves the dominion of established law in a department

* Tyndall, "Essays on the Floating Matter in the Air." It has been pointed out to me that there is this difference between Prof. Pasteur's assertions and those of which we are speaking, that the former were *invariable* concomitants of certain phenomena, the other exceptional occurrences; and that the former could be tested, the latter cannot. In reference to the first of these considerations, it may be replied that whether invariable or not, the alleged phenomena are in direct conflict with the laws of Nature as established by observation, and, therefore, on the principles on which miracles are rejected, they ought to be rejected too. It may be observed that miracles are also invariable concomitants of certain circumstances, those circumstances being the revelation by God of His will to the dwellers upon earth. The second objection has certainly much weight. Prof. Tyndall would undoubtedly reply that had he *not* been able to test Prof. Pasteur's assertions, he would most certainly have rejected them on *à priori* grounds. The question still recurs whether he would have been right in doing so; whether we are justified in rejecting the assertions of competent witnesses, because those assertions conflict with the results of previous observation. Whether the writers of Scripture were competent witnesses is a question that will be discussed further on. Our point now is whether we are entitled to disbelieve what they say without entering into any such inquiry.

where it had been supposed to have failed. But we are concerned with his method, not with his conclusions. He does not *assume* that his opponent's theory is unsound, but so far as his experiments have gone, he *proves* it. And there is little doubt that if his experiments had hopelessly broken down, instead of being remarkably successful and suggestive, he would have been compelled to admit that it was at least possible that there was a region here in which what elsewhere, so far as had been observed, was an invariable law of Nature, had been overruled. We admit that the conditions of the present question are not precisely the same. In the case of the Christian miracles, the events alleged to have occurred are not alleged to be occurring now, and therefore they cannot now be tested by scientific investigation. If they ever happened at all, they happened a long time back. The whole inquiry, therefore, is concerned with testimony; in other words, it belongs, not to physical, but to historical science. What we have to ask is, whether the testimony on which we have received the miracles recorded in Scripture is worthy to be accepted or not. This, if we are to pursue the scientific method, is the question before us. Science does not ask whether things *can* occur, but whether they *have* occurred or *do* occur. If the facts are capable of investigation, science investigates them. If they are alleged to have occurred in the past, instead of investigating the phenomena themselves, she discusses the evidence for their occurrence. If, therefore, the question before us is to be argued on scientific principles, the question of the possibility or impossibility of miracles does not come before us at all. Since all the inductive* sciences are founded on observation, we cannot prove that miracles are impossible unless we

* See p. 32.

prove conclusively that they never did occur. We have therefore simply to deal with the alternative, whether it is more likely that the miracles should have occurred, or that the testimony on which we believe them to have occurred is false. The question before us is a question of fact, and questions of fact can be settled on testimony, and on testimony alone.

The folly of disbelieving what we cannot understand or explain has been shown to us by various instances. Hume is much embarrassed by the well-known story of the Indian prince who rejected with scorn the idea that a fluid like water could become solid by the simple withdrawal of heat. In trying to distinguish between this case and that of miracles, Hume gives up the whole question at issue. "The Indian," he says, "who refused to believe that water could freeze, reasoned justly," that is, according to the premises from which Hume starts. And yet he came to a conclusion which was not only incorrect, but absurd. What can be clearer, therefore, than that the premises from which Hume starts are wrong ones? And he gets more confused in his reasoning as he dimly perceives that he has laid himself open to this accusation. After all, he says, it was "not contrary to the Indian prince's experience that water should freeze." But the only ground on which he denied it was because he had never seen or heard of such a thing before, which it is to be presumed is what is meant by "contrary to his experience." And therein he was wiser than those who declare miracles to be impossible. For they *have* heard of them on competent testimony, and yet they refuse to believe them because they are contrary, not to universal experience in the abstract, for that is the very point at issue, but to the ordinary experience of mankind. But Hume goes on to strengthen his weak position with other paste-

board fortifications. The Indian prince was justified in his scepticism, because it was "making a new experiment to place nature in this situation,"* and the "consequence of this is always uncertain." Again, it was "extraordinary, but not miraculous, nor contrary to the uniform experience of Nature in cases where the circumstances are the same." It is strange how a clear-headed man like Hume could fail to see that he is here driven to the shifts of puzzle-headed persons, who, when they perceive that their argument has brought them into difficulties, make shift to escape under cover of a cloud of words without meaning. But he goes on, "They never saw Muscovy in the winter, and therefore they cannot be really positive what would then be the consequence." This admission covers the whole case of the defenders of miracles. We are not competent judges of what may take place in Nature under conditions with which we are unacquainted. The interference with the laws and forces at work in Nature, caused by the intervention, for reasonable causes, of the Being who created it, and keeps it in being, constitute conditions with which we are not, and most probably never shall be, acquainted. We, therefore, cannot reasonably "be positive" what, under such circumstances, might possibly happen. The principle, in fact, that we are entitled to reject whatever is contrary to our ordinary experience, or the ordinary experience of mankind, would lead to some very remarkable results. Not only would it close men's eyes to everything but the visible, but it would put a stop to all scientific progress and discovery whatsoever. The very essence of science consists in the adding new facts to our previous experience. Hume's method would entitle us to reject with scorn every proclamation of a fact or law hitherto unknown. The first

* "Inquiry Concerning the Human Understanding," Sect. x.

observer of a comet, the astronomer who in 1866 reported the sudden blazing out of the star in Corona Borealis, would be alike unworthy of credit. The traveller who comes home with accounts of strange phenomena, of human life under new conditions, of effects of climate and forces of nature hitherto unknown, must be disbelieved.* The naturalist who tells us of the animal that inhabits the seas, the fish that flies or climbs trees in which it passes the night, is to be held undeserving of a moment's attention. And as for Stephenson, before the House of Commons, declaring his belief that a railway carriage might be propelled by steam at the rate of twenty miles an hour, Wheatstone asserting the possibility of sending messages at lightning speed across the Atlantic, Daguerre declaring that he could make the sun paint pictures, as well as the inventor of the telephone and microphone in our own day,—they should, on Hume's principles, have been summarily checked in their career of discovery by confinement in a lunatic asylum.

Thus, then, when Hume tells us that it is incredible that a dead man should be restored to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country, we refer him to his own principles. We cannot see what other laws are at work in the universe beside those by which the visible frame of things is kept in motion. Therefore we "cannot really be positive what would be the consequence," when those higher laws intervene to modify the action of the lower ones. When he subjoins that if any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, "I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should deceive or be deceived," or that the fact which he relates had really happened, we are, it may be confessed,

* As Marco Polo was, and, as more recent knowledge shows, unreasonably, very often.

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upon safer ground. It is, as Hume puts it, not a question of antecedent possibility or impossibility, but simply one of evidence. Only even then we must recall to the mind of the inquirer a fact which Hume carefully keeps out of sight—that the probability or improbability of miracles varies directly as the probability or improbability of the existence of a Being who has power to control the course of Nature. Granted the existence of a Personal God, and the antecedent improbability of interferences with the course of Nature is reduced to a minimum. Or we might even say that the balance is inclined the other way, and that there is a very high degree of probability that the otherwise uniform course of Nature *will* be disturbed, whenever there is sufficient reason for it. So far, then, from there being any antecedent improbability in miracles under this hypothesis, there is, on the contrary, a very high degree of probability in their favour—a probability which requires a far less amount of testimony to convince us of their having happened, than if, as is assumed by Hume and other reasoners, the occurrence of miracles came to us weighted by a very heavy balance of probability against them. This may serve to explain what appears to unbelievers to be the extraordinary credulity of Christians concerning miracles. The question, in fact, resolves itself into the broader and deeper one of the existence of a Being whose interest in His creatures is moral and spiritual, rather than purely material, and who may be supposed to modify very considerably the order of the material universe, whenever sufficient moral and spiritual reasons may exist to lead Him to do so. This question, as we have already stated, we cannot attempt in this work to treat fully. But we shall recur to the subject in a future chapter.* For the present we content

* Chap. vii,

ourselves with saying, that until the existence of a Personal God be disproved, it is impossible to establish the doctrine of the impossibility of miracles on the ground of the necessary uniformity of Nature.

One reason, however, which has been advanced in favour of necessary uniformity in Nature is compatible with a belief in the existence of a Personal God, though it may be justly reproached with laying down very arbitrary canons concerning His action. We are told that God can hardly be supposed to set aside His own work; that it is reducing Him to a contradiction, to an absurdity, to suppose Him capable of counteracting forces which His will had brought into being. This, as has been seen, is Wegscheider's objection.* To admit miracles, it is contended, that is, to suppose forces to be counteracted by other forces, is to suppose God to be inconsistent with Himself.† The slightest acquaintance with physical science is sufficient to overthrow such a statement.‡ Not only is the principle of the counteraction of force by force a principle of nature, but the *same* forces sometimes act in the most opposite way. Not only is heat generally a repulsive force and cold an attractive one; but electricity sometimes attracts and sometimes repels, and cold occasionally, as in the case of water

* See p. 9, note.

† "It requires very little penetration to discover the quiet assumptions on which this reasoning is founded. It assumes that because Nature is an expression of God's will, there can be no other expression" (McCosh, "The Supernatural in Relation to the Natural," p. 128).

‡ "Continually we behold in the world around us lower laws held in restraints by higher, mechanic by dynamic, chemical by vital, physical by moral; yet we say not, when the lower thus gives place in favour of the higher, that there was any violation of law, or that anything contrary to Nature came to pass; rather we acknowledge the law of a greater freedom swallowing up the law of a lesser" (Trench, "Introduction to the Study of Miracles," p. 16).

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after it has cooled below freezing point, reverses its action, and causes the particles which have been brought together to separate once more. Are we to suppose that God contradicts Himself because He has created positive and negative electricity, because similar poles exert a repellent and opposite ones an attractive influence? Are we to suppose that His non-existence is proved because, in order to cause ice to float, He has reversed the action of cold in the case of water below a certain temperature? But we may go further. We may assert that the visible universe is kept in being solely by the neutralization by one another of opposing forces. There is not a single body, solid or liquid, which is not maintained in its condition by a balance of the forces of attraction and repulsion.* The principle of counteraction of force by force meets us everywhere in nature. By it the stars revolve in their orbits. By it every process whereby vegetable and animal life is sustained is carried on. By it every single action of every vegetable and animal is performed. It is, we know, by the counteraction of the first law of motion by that of gravitation that the motions of the heavenly bodies are directed. It is by the counteraction of the laws of motion by gravitation that we are prevented from flying off from the earth as it revolves with vast velocity round its axis. The rotation of the seasons, the growth of vegetables and animals, is the result of the most complex interaction of magnetic, chemical and vital forces, in addition to that of the laws of motion and

* Is the attractive force electricity, the repulsive heat? Yet compounds such as water are decomposed by electricity, which here acts as a repulsive force of the strongest kind. It may be objected that heat and electricity are not forces, but simply "modes of motion." But if so, they must be due to the action of some forces. And so far as phenomena go, the laws of these forces are complex, not simple like those of motion and gravitation,

gravitation just mentioned. One of the most common phenomena in nature is an instance of this counteraction of force by force. Water is, as we know, employed to quench fire. And yet oxygen, one of the component parts of water, is remarkable for its tendency to nourish fire and keep it alive. By association with hydrogen it is deprived of this quality, and has precisely the opposite effect. The law by which a vegetable grows upward is the result of chemical and vital force overcoming the action of gravitation. The law by which animals move, and men raise weights from the ground, is another instance of the control of an "invariable" law, of an ever-acting "force," by the influence of that most inscrutable of forces which we call *Will*. Thus, then, facts compel us to admit that God *has* permitted "interferences" with His own work to a very considerable extent. Nature is actually administered on the very principle of counteraction of force by force which has been declared impossible. Therefore if we maintain that the doctrine of the counteraction of law by higher law compels us to admit inconsistency in God, we are constrained to believe Nature herself a chaos; to hold that the marvellous system of balance of forces, of adaptation of means to ends, which has excited, and still excites, the admiration of men of science, and which provides endless occupation to their intellects and energies, is itself nothing but a mass of inconsistency and folly, beneath the notice of the philosopher, unworthy the attention of a rational being. But if the counteraction of force by force, the subordination of lower laws to higher, be in truth the first principle of existence in the material world, we can hardly contend that it is inconsistent with the Being of God. We are constrained to allow that as it is confessedly a part of the order of the material creation, so it may be part of a higher order

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still, to which the unassisted human intellect has not as yet been enabled to penetrate.

But without assuming the truths of revelation, we may be able to advance somewhat further towards a rational conception of the nature of that higher order, which is unapproachable by the processes of observation and consequent induction. And we may do this by inquiring for what cause the visible creation was brought into being. It is surely no very extravagant assumption to suppose that it had some higher purpose to subserve than a mere material one.* It is not an unreasonable conjecture that it may have been created to minister to the happiness of the rational and intelligent beings with which it is now peopled. A good many grounds exist whereby such a conjecture may be justified. Over and above the means provided by contrivances of infinite vastness and complexity, for the subsistence of the animal creation, we find substances which in various ways respond to the intelligence of man, and become, by the exercise of his reason, better fitted to minister to his wants than they were originally. The processes of tillage, whereby the fruits of the earth are made

* The argument from design may serve to strengthen this reasoning. It is beyond our province to enter upon the details into which Paley has so fully entered in his "Natural Theology," and on which so many other able writers have dwelt, in order to prove that design implies a designer. But we may at least argue that the infinite care bestowed upon Nature implies that she exists for some purpose beyond herself. To suppose that the exquisitely elaborated system of Nature—elaborated to an extent which a hundred volumes could not adequately describe, had no other end than that creative energy might revel in its own creations, is a vaster demand on our credulity than the doctrine of miracles. To suppose the world a "fortuitous concourse of atoms," to teach that "force" and "attraction" and "molecular action" somehow produced for themselves with such extraordinary ingenuity their illimitable and complex relations, is a greater demand on our credulity still. "No ordinary

available for the subsistence of a great many more human beings than they were in an uncultivated state, the employment of the domestic animals, the use of animal and vegetable substances for food, clothing, habitation and fuel, suggest at least the idea that these substances were from the first intended to supply the necessities of mankind. The progress of discovery throughout the ages, the way in which the treasures of the earth are made increasingly available for the comforts of man, for gratifying his higher appetites, for satisfying his taste for beauty in art, and for the complex and artificial kind of life to which we apply the term civilized, the way in which all these discoveries enable us to reach a higher region of intellect, and to enjoy a worthier and more refined kind of happiness than is possible in a lower degree of civilization—all these facts tend to confirm the idea that the material universe and its laws do not exist simply for themselves, but as handmaids to something beyond—something which will satisfy the wants of the nobler part of the human organization, the mind, soul, or spirit of

mind," says Dr. Whewell in his "Plurality of Worlds" (p. 334), "can refuse its conviction" to the evidence of an intelligent Creator, furnished by the "wise adaptation," the "skilful selection of means to ends," of the "provident contrivance," to be found in Nature. And he goes on to contend (p. 370) that "when all is done the material world *must* be put in an inferior place to the world of mind. If there be a World of Mind, *that*, according to all that we can conceive, must have been better worth creating, must be more worthy to exist, as an object of care in the eyes of the Creator, than thousands or millions of stars and planets, even if they were occupied by a million times as many species of brute animals as have lived upon the earth since its vivification." We hear a great deal of the "dignity of man" just now. But nothing could be more fatal to any ideas of such dignity than the materialistic doctrine that "thought is a mere function of the brain," instead of the far higher conception that the brain is a machine through the medium of which the higher realm of Mind acts upon the lower realm of matter.

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man. That there should be order in the material universe would seem to be both conducive to the happiness of man, and in accordance with what we can conceive of the nature of God. But to put the order itself in the place of the purposes which that order is obviously intended to subserve, would seem to be in the highest degree unreasonable. To suppose that an order must necessarily become disorder when it is occasionally overruled for the sake of higher necessities than itself was designed to meet, is not only an extravagant supposition *per se*, but it is demonstrated to be so by our ordinary experience. It is not disorderly in human affairs to suspend laws, to alter arrangements made for one purpose, when to adhere to them would be to defeat purposes of more importance still.*

If the lower or material order, so far as this earth is concerned, exists solely for the happiness of the intelligent beings God has placed here, it is certainly not incredible to suppose that it can be modified when it is found to be insufficient to attain the object for which it was designed. Now there exists a very important fact, which in a very marked yet very strange way interferes with the happiness of those beings. That fact is sin, and sin is a breach of the moral law which God has prescribed to mankind to be obeyed. The existence of evil is a fact that cannot be denied, however it may be explained. The existence of misery in connection with that evil is another patent fact

* Take, for instance, such a case as the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act. This Act is designed for the protection of the liberty of the subject. But when that liberty is menaced by the existence of an organization which sets all law at defiance, it is clear that when ordinary means fail extraordinary means must be resorted to. The means ordinarily employed to secure the end having failed in this particular case it is not inconsistent, but in the highest degree consistent, to employ different ones for the same end. See this view carried further, p. 33.

which not even the most superficial observer of mankind can overlook. It is equally clear that the uniformity of physical Nature provides no remedy either for moral evil or the misery it has caused. That the Creator of the world, who has given so many proofs of His care and love for His creatures, should have devised a method of escape from this misery for His creatures is at least not incredible. Nor is it incredible that this method of escape may involve some interference with the visible order of Nature. For the misery which has to be relieved has produced and is producing physical results. The disturbance of the moral order has flowed over and invaded the physical universe. What more probable than that the remedial agency, if such an agency there be, should also make its effects visible in the physical universe? Thus the patent fact of the existence of disorder in the moral world supplies us with a presumption against the uniformity of Nature.*

Nor, if we compare the physical universe to a machine which acts with undeviating regularity, is the above argument appreciably weakened. The supposition is a pure assumption,† but even on the ground of that assumption we

* See this argument carried further in Chap. vi.

† “This ingenious simile fails only in the important particulars that both its terms are utterly unlike the objects they profess to represent. The world is not a machine; and God is not a mechanic. The world is not a machine, for it consists, not merely of wheels of brass and springs of steel and the fixed properties of inanimate matter, but of living and intelligent and free-acting persons, capable of personal relations to a living and intelligent and free-acting Ruler. And God is not a mechanic; for the mechanic is separated from his machine by the whole diameter of being; as mind, giving birth to material results; as the conscious workman, who meets with no reciprocal consciousness in his work. It may be a higher evidence of mechanical skill to abandon brute matter once for all to its own laws; but to take this as the analogy of God's dealings with His living creatures—as well tell us that the

may join issue with our antagonists. If we see in the universe and in some piece of mechanism the same adaptations of means to ends, the same regularity of action, we must remember that one of the most essential characteristics of the machine of man's contrivance is its subordination to the human will. A machine without a guiding will cannot be made to work. And if it requires a will to keep it going, the same will must surely be equally able to stop it when necessary. Such at least is the case with machinery of man's devising. At the cry of human suffering, at the demand of human nature for rest, when necessary repairs and alterations are to be made, the vast and complex system is brought to a stand in a few seconds, and this without the least derangement of its component parts, however various and finely adjusted to their purpose. To deny such a possibility in the case of the material universe is practically to assert that it is designed with less skill and ingenuity than human mechanism—a supposition hardly, one would think, either reasonable or probable in itself, or in any way borne out by the facts.

We may carry this argument a step further. A machine without a purpose is an absurdity—a sheer waste of energy. That purpose is in some way or other the advantage, if not of mankind at large, at least of those who contrived it. But the inventor would never have brought it into being had he not reserved to himself the power to control it whenever its action might threaten to prove inconsistent with that purpose. The objectors to miracles are driven to the alternative, either that the world is a machine brought into existence without a purpose, or that its Maker

highest image of parental love and forethought is that of the ostrich, which 'leaveth her eggs in the earth and warmeth them in dust'" (Mansel, "*Bampton Lectures*," p. 123, 4th ed.).

failed to reserve to Himself the power to control it when its purpose was in danger of being defeated. The existence of suffering such as no natural forces can relieve is not denied. Whether any interference with those forces could in any way relieve that distress is fair matter for argument. But what is unreasonable is to deny that the Creator *could* interfere with those forces if such interference *would* relieve the distress.

This view of the case will be strengthened when we come in the next chapter to consider the nature of force. But we may adduce another comparison to show that the view of Nature as a machine, with a necessary uniformity of action, has been pressed too far.* In what we call the uniformity of nature a very wide diversity of action is embraced. Some natural phenomena are the very reverse of uniform, whatever the nature of the forces by which they are governed. And thus it may be as agreeable to the facts to represent the course of nature as the regularity of a well-ordered family, which goes on unbroken for years in all its main features while all is well, but which is liable to be modified by sickness, or misfortune, or any other unusual event which renders such modification necessary.†

Another consideration may not be out of place before we

* "The world is no curious piece of mechanism, which its Maker constructs, and then dismisses from His hands, only from time to time reviewing and repairing it" (Trench, "Notes on the Miracles," chap. ii.).

† Archbishop Trench ("Notes on the Miracles," p. 17, sixth ed.) has some useful remarks on this question of the necessary subordination of lower to higher law when the higher rational or moral element comes in. He illustrates by the order of service in the Church of England. "It is the rule," he says, "that if the festival of the Nativity fall on a day which was designated in the ordinary calendar as a fast, the former shall displace the latter, and the day shall be observed as a festival. Shal we therefore say that the Church has awkwardly contrived two systems

leave this subject. We have suggested that the material universe may be regarded as a part of a higher order, governed by law in such a way that the higher laws occasionally interfere to modify the action of the lower. But such interferences are not only not capricious or irregular, they are not even frequent. Had they been represented as frequent, there might have been just cause for suspicion of the testimony on which they have been credited. But it is not so. The *general* uniformity of the course of Nature is conceded on all hands. The defender of miracles only contends for occasional interruptions of that order when a higher necessity requires, not for constant interferences with what has been admirably designed by infinite Providence for the ends it is designed to fulfil. Revelation does not call upon us to believe in continual miracles. At certain critical periods in the world's history they occurred often; but whole centuries intervened without anything extraordinary being reported to have happened.* And since the full revelation of God's purpose has been given to mankind, though certain occurrences of a miraculous nature

which here may, and sometimes do, come into collision with one another? and not rather admire her more complex law, and note how in the very concurrence of the two, with the displacement of the poorer by the richer, she brings out her sense that holy joy is a loftier thing even than holy sorrow, and shall at last swallow it up altogether?" The force of this illustration is increased by the fact that there *is* a moral order, a right and wrong in the world, and that it is by no means necessary to believe that this moral order is subsidiary to the physical. If the contrary be the case, as there seems every reason to suppose, it cannot be unreasonable to suppose that circumstances may occur in which the subsidiary law may be overruled for higher purposes.

* "The miracles of the Old Testament are chiefly grouped round two great epochs in the history of the theocratic kingdom,—that of its foundation under Moses and Joshua, and that of its restoration by (Elijah and Elisha" Mansel, "Essay on Miracles," *Aids to Faith*, p. 9).

are declared in some quarters to have occurred, it appears on the whole most probable that miracles have entirely ceased. God's will having now been fully made known to mankind, it would seem reasonable to suppose that there no longer exists any cause for the interruption of the order which was intended as a general rule to be uniform.* We do not deny that the forces which have been observed to be at work in the universe act by unvaried laws, and are calculated under ordinary circumstances to produce an unvaried order. All we contend is, that exceptional circumstances occasionally occur to overrule that order. We accept the conclusions of physical science as the general laws by which the government of the visible universe is carried on.† Man is not to look for continual suspensions of the very laws brought into existence to provide for all his ordinary needs. To these he is left for the supply of his daily wants, the healing of his diseases, the conflict with adverse circumstances, the preservation of his life. But we believe that special laws belonging to another sphere altogether may step in on rare occasions to modify the action of these general laws. Whether such special laws have ever been in operation must depend partly upon testimony, partly on the light thrown by other departments of evidence upon the doctrine of a personal God, but chiefly on the probability or improbability that all things which are derive their existence from the fiat of a Divine Will, embracing in its scope an infinity of other things beside that natural order, which is all that falls under the observation of man.

* See below, Chap. xiv.

† It may be observed that our Lord Jesus Christ acted on this principle. He steadfastly refused to set aside the ordinary laws of God's kingdom save when necessity required. Nay, He regarded the suggestion to do otherwise as a temptation of the evil one. See Matt. iv. 1-12; Luke iv. 1-13.

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To sum up what has been said, we deny that the absolute invariability of the natural order can be proved deductively, because we cannot assume this invariability as a premiss, and failing this, we have no premisses on which to proceed. We deny that it can be proved inductively, for a complete induction* must embrace all the facts, and there are alleged facts which may be disbelieved, but have not been disproved, which are inconsistent with such an invariable order.† We say that the possibility of other laws of creation than those by which the world is governed is not inconceivable, for it has been conceived, and this by scientific men of the highest eminence, and that scientific calculations have been based on such conceptions. We say that not only is the counteraction of one law by another not inconsistent with the idea of God, but that it has been proved to be a fundamental principle of the world He has created. We contend, further, that the visible world exists not for itself, but for a purpose beyond itself, and that if for the attainment of that higher purpose it is supposed necessary that purely mechanical laws should be suspended or counteracted, there is nothing in such a supposition inconsistent with the idea of Infinite Wisdom. We observe, moreover, that the order of the visible universe has been prejudicially

* For clearness' sake, it will be well to define the terms used. Deduction is the conclusion drawn from certain premisses, such as if A is equal to B, and B to C, then A is equal to C. Induction is the probable conclusion at which, after observing a number of facts, we arrive regarding their cause.

† This argument may perhaps be better understood thus. Before we can advance to the conclusion that the order of nature is invariable, we must have discovered that all the facts tend to that conclusion. But miracles are facts (or at least *alleged* facts) which point to a different conclusion. Before, then, we are entitled to assume the uniformity of nature, we must have shown, by incontestable evidence, that the alleged miracles never happened.

affected by a power external to it, and we contend that if such an adverse influence has disturbed the physical order, there is nothing unreasonable in the supposition that measures taken to remedy this evil influence may also result in a disturbance of the physical order. And we contend, lastly, that since the phenomena of the visible universe so clearly point to a Being who has called it into existence for purposes far transcending the limits of the visible and the sensible, there exists the very strongest probability that the necessities of that infinitely higher purpose should produce occasional modifications of any purely mechanical uniformity, the more especially when such uniformity cannot be shown to be in any sense necessary.

CHAPTER IV.

CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN? FORCE, LAW, AND WILL.

WE have in the last chapter concluded by saying that the laws of the material universe exist by no necessity, but that there is at least a high probability that they owe their being solely and simply to the will of the Creator. This view of the case will derive much additional probability when we enter upon the inquiry what is the meaning of words which play so conspicuous a part in modern scientific discovery, and which are invoked with such imposing effect against those who venture to speak of interpositions of the Divine Will. What *is* Force, and what *is* Law, and what are the relations that they bear on the one hand to the constituent parts of the material universe, and on the other to its Author? The most practised observer cannot trace to its source the force of which he speaks so readily. It is a certain hidden power or energy which acts on material particles, and its law is the observed method of its working. That certain forces are ever at work in the material world is undeniable. That the method of their working is always the same under the same conditions, is also a fact which observation has conclusively established. But the most minute investigation into the nature and mode of operation of any force does after all but bring us to the conclusion that it is a manifestation of the will of some invisible being.

Force, then, is simply an unseen power, acting, from causes

and by means concerning which we have no information, upon the various atoms existing in the visible world.* This fact alone ought to make scientific men careful in their assertions respecting so mysterious a power. We know nothing whatever about Force save that it has been observed ordinarily to produce certain defined and calculable results. So little, in fact, do scientific men know of its source, that one of the most eminent of their number has lately contended that it can only be traced to a spiritual origin (that is, to an order of things altogether outside the range of things material), and that certain spiritual or angelic agencies may not unreasonably be supposed to be charged with the task of watching it and keeping it in action.†

We have defined *Law*, when applied to Force, as the "observed order of its working." But the ambiguity of the term "law" is the source of much confusion of thought, and much of the doubt which has been cast upon the possibility of the miraculous is the result of using this word in three or four different senses at once.‡ The first sense is that in

* Sir John Herschel describes force as nothing more than "the effect of a consciousness or will existing somewhere" ("Astronomy," sect. 440).

† Professor Balfour Stewart, in an unpublished paper read before the Victoria Institute on May 4th, 1881. See also the "Unseen Universe," by Professors Tait and Balfour Stewart. So M. Hirn, in his "Exposition de la Théorie Mécanique de la Chaleur," contends that so far from investigations into the working of natural forces leading logically either to Materialism or Pantheism, they clearly lead to the purest Spiritualism.

‡ The Duke of Argyll thus distinguishes the various senses in which the term "law" is used :—"First, we have Law as applied simply to an observed order of facts. Secondly, to that order as involving the action of some force or forces of which nothing more may be known. Thirdly, as applied to individual forces, the measure of whose operation has been more or less defined or ascertained. Fourthly, as applied to those combinations of force which have reference to the fulfilment of purpose or the discharge of function. Fifthly, as applied to abstract conception

which Hooker uses it of God. An "eternal decree" of God is "that which we term eternal law." With regard to inferior agents he defines it as "that which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure."* But this is not the only sense in which the word is used. In its ordinary sense among mankind it implies a certain amount of necessity and constraint. A "law" is passed to prevent men from doing certain things, or to compel them to do them.† It provides certain penalties for the omission or commission of certain acts. Consequently we instinctively connect the idea of necessity, or at least compulsion, with the word, and this idea of necessity or compulsion insensibly attaches to it when no such necessity or compulsion exists.† Let us therefore clearly understand that a law of force is not, and cannot be, the method in which the force *must* act, because we have no means at our disposal for proving that there is any such necessity. The expression can only be used to signify the method in

of the mind, not corresponding with any actual phenomena, but deduced therefrom as axioms of thought necessary to our understanding of them. Law, in this sense, is a reduction of the phenomena, not merely to an order of facts, but to an order of thought" ("Reign of Law," pp. 64, 65). Whether this statement of the case be accurate or not, it at least brings before us clearly the liability to confusion of thought from the various senses in which the word "law" is used.

* Hooker, "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book I., 2.

† Dugald Stewart, "Philosophy of the Human Mind," II. 160 (Sir W. Hamilton's Ed.), speaks of this phraseology as "confounding moral laws with physical, or in plainer terms, confounding laws which are addressed by a legislator to intelligent beings with those general conclusions concerning the established order of the universe, which, when legitimately inferred from an induction sufficiently extensive, philosophers have metaphorically applied the title of Laws and Nature."

which the force has been observed to act. Of course we may, if we please, with Professor Dugald Stewart, regard this "uniform operation" as "prescribed by the Deity to Himself."* We may conceive of a law as presupposing "an agent and a power, and the laws of nature as prescribed by His wisdom, who called nature into being."† But we must remember that such laws, if imposed at all, are arbitrarily imposed. They exist, as we have seen in the last chapter, from no inherent necessity in the nature of things themselves. They present themselves to us simply as means towards a higher end. And, therefore, it is quite conceivable that they may be dispensed with or overruled, or modified, by the action of other laws, whenever it may seem fit to Him who has prescribed them to Himself.‡

* "Philosophy of the Human Mind," II., 159. "In those political associations from which the metaphor is borrowed, the laws are addressed to rational and voluntary agents, who are able to comprehend their meaning, and to regulate their conduct accordingly; whereas, in the material universe, the subjects of our observation are understood by all men to be unconscious and passive, and consequently *the order* so admirably maintained, amidst all the various *changes* they actually undergo, not only implies *intelligence* in its first conception, but implies, in its continued existence, the incessant agency of *power* executing the purposes of wise design. . . . In employing, however, the word with an exclusive reference to experimental philosophy, it is more correctly logical to consider it as merely a statement of some *general fact* with respect to the order of nature."

† See Dr. Whewell's "Astronomy," p. 361.

‡ "*Laws* of God exist only for us. It is a *will* of God for Himself" (Abp. Trench, "Notes on the Miracles," chap. II.). The language is not clear, but what seems to be meant is that what we call a "law of Nature" is only what we have observed to be the usual method of God's working, but that this method is not as it were imposed upon God by any external necessity, but exists solely because it is His will that it should do so,

Another caution may be borne in mind on this point. The term "law of force" is, strictly speaking, confined to the observed order of action of some one particular force. But the term "laws of nature" is applied to the complex system of interaction of various forces which produces all the phenomena we observe around us. And not only this, but writers are wont to ascend from "laws" to "law." To paraphrase the expression of the Greek comic poet,* they enthrone Law as the king of the universe, *vice* the Deity, deposed; God is subject to law, not law to Him. And so instead of an All-wise Providence, "ordering all things according to the counsel of His own will," we hear of "invariable law," "inexorable law," and the like. It will be well to investigate the accuracy of these expressions. We have already shown that the term "law," applied to force, does not involve any notion of necessity, but only an observed order.† But even if we admitted that this observed order of the action of this one force never has been, and never will be, suspended, we should be very far from admitting that the laws of nature, as ordinarily observed, can never be altered in any way, or by any means. The order of nature is kept in being, as we have seen, by a variety of forces, each of which, while invariable in its method of working, assists, when controlled in that working by the action of other forces, in producing combinations practically infinite. We talk of the "invariable force" of gravitation, and we speak accurately. And yet it is a known fact that the moon, under the action of that "invariable" force, never returns to exactly the same place in the heavens which she has occupied before; or, more strictly speaking, the

* Aristophanes, "Clouds," 828.

† The rules of navigation never steered a ship, and the law of gravity never moved a planet. Reid's Works, p. 206.

earth and moon together never occupy twice the same relative position with regard to the other heavenly bodies. We speak of the fixed orbits in which the planets revolve. Yet so manifold are the perturbations which their mutual influence on each other causes, that no planet ever twice describes precisely the same orbit round the sun. And as it is now considered not improbable that the whole stellar system, including our own sun and the planets depending upon it, are in motion round some central luminary, we have additional grounds for maintaining that nothing is more variable than the position of the heavenly bodies, though governed by "invariable law." If we come to the results of force upon the earth, the same result follows. What more "invariable" than the order of the four seasons? What more certain than that since the world began, no season has ever been exactly like another? Electricity, magnetism, attraction, heat, light, chemical forces, are all directed by "invariable" laws. Yet the various phenomena produced by the mutual effect of these forces are beyond all enumeration. The science of geology tells us that this variety of results must be indefinitely extended, if we add our experience of the earth's past history to our experience of its present condition.* Thus, then, however "invariable" laws of force may be, their result, so far from being "exact," "inexorable," "inevitable," incapable of variation, is variety itself. And since we can only estimate Force as the expression of Will, there exists

* We have this upon the authority of a scientific man of such eminence as Sir Charles Lyell. "Any one who presumes to dogmatize respecting the absolute uniformity of the order of Nature, is rebuked by geological evidence of the changes which that order has already undergone" ("Principles of Geology," 153-154). And Mill frankly admits the fact, though in very singular language: "The course of Nature, in truth, is not only uniform, it is also infinitely various,"

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neither a natural nor a logical necessity for supposing it impossible that other forces, other expressions of will, that is, belonging to an order equally within the domain of will, but an order which is, ordinarily speaking, outside the sphere of our observation, should step in, and by their "invariable" laws increase yet more the variety of the phenomena which observation has recorded.

And not only so, but the facts of physical science actually demand that this possibility should be conceded. It was laid down at the outset that in a question of this kind observation was our only guide. And the results of observation compel us to lay down the canon, that *will is one of the observed forces of nature*. Not only does that obscure, and as yet most inexplicable of forces, *vital* force, counteract continually the other forces which have been observed in nature; not only does it group material atoms after a manner peculiarly its own, controlling the action of chemical, attractive, repulsive forces, according to laws which we have made some progress in ascertaining, but in animal life at least, *will* is a force most incontrovertibly in action, and depending as it does upon causes not purely material, and certainly calculable by no processes which have as yet been discovered, it does nevertheless very largely modify the "invariable" forces with which it has to deal, and within certain limits (which limits are continually increasing), does very materially affect the condition of the globe on which we live.*

* "That mysterious, yet unquestionable presence of *Will*—that agent, uncompelled, yet not uninfluenced, whose continuous existence and productive energy are summed up in the word *Myself*—those warnings and promptings of a Spirit striving with our spirit—that twofold consciousness of infirmity and strength in the hour of temptation—that overwhelming conviction of sin in the sight of One higher and holier than we,—these are facts of experience, to the full as real and

We are told that force is invariable, and "law" omnipotent, and that it is illogical to suppose that will can control or modify either. And yet the hands which printed this book, and the hand that took it up to read, did so in defiance of the "invariable" action of force, and in contradiction to the "inexorable" influence of what is properly known as natural law. That will has laws of its own we are not concerned to deny. But we affirm that those laws, if they exist, belong to another than the natural order, and that they govern the action of forces which modify and control that natural order from without.* This is all that we assert when we contend that miracles have occurred. We do not contend that miracles are outside *all* law. They are certainly not outside that "Law Eternal" which God hath eternally purposed in His works to observe.† They are simply the result of other forces,‡ of the laws of whose working we know little or nothing, controlling and counteracting the action of the forces whose laws observation has enabled us to calculate with precision.

Thus then, by a process purely scientific, by observation and induction alone, we have come to the conclusion that there is a force, whose action cannot be reduced to any known laws, which belongs to an order outside the material world, and which is controlling and counteracting the action

as certain as the laws of planetary motions and chemical affinities,—facts which Philosophy is bound to take into account, or to stand convicted as shallow and one-sided,—facts which can deceive us only if our whole consciousness is a liar, and the wasted voice of reason itself but an echo of the universal lie" (Mansel, "Bampton Lectures," p. 125).

* It is to be observed that the word "law" here does not involve the idea of necessity. The laws of Will, as of any other force, are only the observed order of its action.

† Hooker, "Ecclesiastical Polity," I., 3.

‡ That is, acts of will.

of the "invariable" forces of nature in precisely the way which miracles are supposed to do. This force is the will of a being who has power over nature. It produces results in direct defiance of the most established natural laws. The tendency of a body at rest, or more strictly speaking *relatively* at rest (for nothing in the universe is absolutely at rest), to remain in that condition is one of the most universally admitted of all physical laws. The tendency of a body in motion to remain in motion is equally "inexorable." Yet by a skilful manipulation of force, man's will compels the body thus at rest to move, and not only to move, but to move with considerable velocity, and as speedily brings the body thus in motion to rest again. No law is more "immutably" fixed than the tendency of solids of a higher specific gravity to descend through fluids of a lower specific gravity, by the action of gravitation. Iron is heavier than water. By the "invariable" laws of force it ought in all cases to sink to the bottom of the sea. Yet by ingenious combinations or adaptations of force we find man able to construct iron ships, which can make sea voyages to the most distant parts with perfect safety. In like manner is he able to propel inanimate bodies of immense bulk through media of very considerable resisting power. The method by which electric forces are robbed of their destructive power and conducted harmless to the earth, belongs to another class of instances of the power of Will over Force. Still more remarkable is the skill with which, by the most delicate adjustments, the same forces are controlled and compelled to carry the workings of the human mind, and even the tones of the human voice, to a distance a million times as great as that to which natural law permits them to be transported. And in all these instances, and in a thousand others which might be adduced, the action of no

force is "suspended." It remains in action, but, by means of will, such a combination of other forces is brought to bear upon it as to make it practically inoperative.

Though the immense moral revolution produced by these discoveries does not at present come under our consideration, the direct results of will upon natural phenomena on a larger scale are a part of our present subject. The climate of the world is affected by human action. Man cuts down forests, and the amount of rain is reduced, and the amount of solar warmth increased.* The food supply of the earth is modified by human action. Man drains marshes, and they become fruitful alluvial soil. He clears forest and prairie, and they teem with all kinds of grain. The health of the world is modified by human action. The pestilential swamp is drained and planted with trees, and the noxious vapours that breed fever and ague cease to infest the district.† But not only these, but vaster changes, if they have not been actually effected, are at least within the limits of the conceivable. Professor Sedgwick, of whose acquaintance with the principles of science there can be little doubt, used to refer in his University Lectures to a proposal for cutting through the Isthmus of Panama, and so diverting the Gulf Stream from these islands. The

* See "Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action," by G. P. Marsh.

† An amusing instance of the confusion of thought in the mind of popular writers occurs in an article in *The Times* of December 6th, 1867, written when this sort of language was more popular than it is now: "If the harbour of St. Thomas be pestilential, it must be traceable rather to the supineness and mismanagement of man, the effect cannot be due to the *immutable* conditions of atmosphere and soil." That is to say, man's "supineness and mismanagement" have changed the unchangeable—a rather remarkable result. There is no "antecedent impossibility" in miracles equal to this.

task would be difficult, but not impossible, and its result would be to assimilate the climate of these islands to that of Labrador, which is in the same latitude, with the most incalculable results on the future of the human race.

Though we are not at present discussing the relations of moral to material forces, we may at least point out that Will, as a force, is capable of producing other physical results than those which we have indicated. Pain and disease and famine, resulting in death by starvation, are physical results. And these are either promoted or retarded by the action of man's will in the ways we have just mentioned, and in a thousand others. It needs, again, no very great imagination to conceive the physical results of a vast explosion of dynamite fired from a distance by electricity. Yet what a combination of physical forces, under the direction of intellect and will, is here effected. Nature herself could, by no means with which we are acquainted, have brought about such results within her own order. The introduction of some power from without is required in order to produce them. In other words, as Mill in his "Logic" very justly puts it, "The assertion is, that the usual effect of any cause is defeated, not in the absence, but in consequence of a counteracting cause, namely, a direct interposition of the will of some being who has power over nature."* Such phenomena, we have shown, are of constant occurrence. We ourselves are "beings," who have "power over nature." "Direct interpositions of our wills" continually act as "counteracting causes" to other causes, whose "usual effect is defeated" by them. If, then, observation proves that we have such power, can it be logical to dismiss as absurd the supposition that there exists another, and more powerful Being, who also has

* Mill, "Logic," ii., 158. He afterwards, however, modifies his language.

"power over nature," and that for our benefit, and even for our instruction, He has thought fit to exercise it?

But we shall be told that Will itself is a "natural" force, acting according to certain necessary, but at present undiscovered, laws. If by this is meant that Will is directed by "laws" as "invariable" and "inexorable" as inanimate nature, we may take leave to say that this has never been proved. We may go further, and say that it never will be proved, and that even the belief in it when unproved may produce the most incalculable results for evil upon the earth. Once teach a man that he is not morally responsible for his actions, and you remove the strongest inducement he has to exercise any control over them. Some ingenious theories have been put forward lately by Agnostic moralists in reference to moral responsibility, the discussion of which would lead us too far from our subject. But we may safely leave the practical settlement of this question to the common sense of mankind. When men in general leave off believing in the moral responsibility of the man who beats his wife, or robs a till, or knocks another man down on the high road and absconds with his purse, it may be necessary to inquire whether Will, like thought, be a function of the brain, or whether it be under the control of conscience and reason. Till then, we need enter into no discussion with any save a few lovers of paradox on the point whether will controls Nature, or whether it is controlled by Nature according to rigid and unalterable law.

Another objection to the miraculous which has been raised belongs to this branch of our subject. The question, according to Professor Baden Powell,* between the supporters and the opponents of miracles is not so much concerning the fact, but the cause of the fact. "We grant,"

* "Essays and Reviews," p. 107.

he would say, "that a fact occurred which we are unable to explain. But were we in possession of all the circumstances, we should be able to reduce the fact within the province of natural laws." If the action of will be included in the province of natural law, we need not demur to this statement. If Nature includes the invisible world, the exercise of the Divine Will comes within the sphere of natural law. Nature becomes, with Spinoza, not only the visible and material universe, but an infinity of other things beside;* and the law of Nature becomes that eternal law whereby God has decreed to work,† a law within which will and miracles are clearly comprehended. But if the term "natural law" does *not* include the action of will (and we are surely entitled in a matter of this kind to demand a rigid definition of terms), then the fact is clearly proved by observation that forces outside the sphere of natural laws have "power over nature."‡ In such a case as this it is quite needless to discuss the question whether means are used. If I raise my arm in obedience to the dictates of my will, it is of comparatively little consequence how I do it.§ Successive

* See above, p. 9.

† Hooker, "Ecclesiastical Polity," i., 2.

‡ By the term natural laws is ordinarily understood the laws regulating the course of the visible universe. If this be *not* what is meant, *cadit quæstio*—the whole argument comes to an end. If we stretch the term "natural law" so as to include what is outside the sphere of observation, and therefore of science, objections to the possibility of miracles are reduced to an absurdity. For the whole force of such objections is derived from the supposed fact that miracles conflict with laws *which observation has established*.

§ "It matters not whether this is done by your will directly, calling into play the contractile force of the muscles, or, as some think, by the action of the will liberating the electricity which has neutralized

links in the chain of causation do but lead us to the ultimate fact, which is always the same, namely, the existence of a point where Will acts upon Matter.* Whether it does so mediately or immediately, whether there exists a subtle fluid or agency, call it by what name you please, connecting mind with matter, there still remains the irrefragable fact that in some way or other the metaphysical is connected with the physical order, and that the former is superior to the latter. The same may be said of the visible universe, namely, that its forces do but represent the control of the metaphysical over the physical order. What *means* the Creator employs to act upon matter we do not know. We do not even know that He uses any. For aught we know, the reason why forces act in the manner in which science has observed them to act, may simply be that it is His will that they should do so. In that case, what becomes of the argument about the causes of miracles ? If the Will of God and that of the animate creation be the cause of all things that occur on the earth, surely it is sufficient to

the contractile force and reduced the arm to a condition of statical equilibrium" ("Rector and His Friends," p. 156).

* "There is a point at which will or spirit acts upon matter without a medium" (Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 64). A remarkable instance of the points of contact between physical and vital forces is to be found in the process of digestion. Up to a certain point the matter which has been taken into the stomach, though it may contain "protoplasm," *i.e.*, the elements of vitality, is to all appearance dead matter. There comes, however, a point at which it is quickened into life. The nature of that process no one can explain, nor does it seem explicable except upon the theory that the will of some Being acts upon the "dust of the earth," and "breathes" into it at this particular point the "breath of life." The fact that this process is one of the most common in Nature does none the less remove it from the category of those mechanical forces which, if we are to believe some men of science, are the only ones that exist.

explain any event which occurs in any way contrary to the natural order by referring it directly to that universal cause. Whether God's Will makes use of means, as man's will does, or whether, *pro hac vice*, the action of the force is suspended by the will which called it into being, it is impossible to say, and needless to discuss.

Thus, then, by a consideration of the nature of Force, we are led to the conclusion that after all it matters very little whether we call a miracle a suspension or simply a counteraction of the laws of nature. What are called the "laws of force" are simply the manner in which forces have been observed to act. Concerning the origin of Force, we are absolutely ignorant. We only know that Will is demonstrably one of the sources from which it is derived, and we know no other. Consequently, it is not only conceivable, but in the highest degree probable, that Will—Divine Will—is the only assignable cause for the forces that are at work in nature.* And if this be so, then these forces, being simply the instruments of a Divine purpose, can be caused to cease, either singly or in groups, or be counteracted by other manifestations of will, whenever that purpose requires it. If the Will which directs the universe thinks fit, the suspension of the action of any force may be rigidly confined to the particular part of the material universe in which the miracle is worked. Or other exertions of will, which are mere child's play compared to that which keeps the universe in being, can neutralize the effect which would ordinarily occur from the suspension of the one particular force or group of forces which ceases to operate. Thus the objection of the vast disturbance in nature which the suspension of some laws would cause, such as that of the earth's rotation,

* "The causes of the commonest physical facts are the same as that of miracles" (Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 63).

in the miracle of the sun standing still,* or the return of the shadow on the dial of Ahaz, is not a very formidable one if Force be but the expression of Will ; since even in these extreme cases Omnipotent Will would simply have to decree that all the forces ordinarily at work in this particular case should be suspended, and at its fiat they would cease to act. The great mass, however, of miracles are not of this character. Whatever may be said of their causes, there is nothing contrary to nature in their effects. They consist rather in the anticipation of the processes of nature ; in the production of the results of natural processes without the usual means, rather than in vast natural convulsions.† They are not violations, they are modifications of the laws of the physical universe. The turning water into wine, the feeding the five thousand, are, in themselves, strictly natural processes, but in this case carried out in an unusual way. The walking on the water is no more intrinsically impossible than the floating of an ironclad. The only difference is that man achieves the task by the use of means, Omnipotence may possibly see fit to dispense with them. The same may be said of the healing of diseases, while as to the restoration of the dead to life, it is a fact of the same order as birth, and the former is even a less shock to a reflecting mind ‡ than the latter.

The fact is, that in order to establish the impossibility of miracles, it is necessary first to assume the non-existence of an All-wise Ruler of the universe. For miracles are facts of precisely the same order as the causation of Nature. They are, it is true, a departure from her observed order of working. But they are precisely identical with the powers

* See this question discussed below, Chap. xii.

† See Mozley, "Bampton Lectures."

‡ Abp. Trench, "Notes on the Miracles," Chap. ii.

or forces, call them what we will, which brought the natural order into being. On the hypothesis of a superintending Providence they are quite as intelligible as the existence of Nature itself. It is only the dogma of an inexorable necessity which forbids their occurrence. And this we now see not only to be a pure assumption, but utterly irreconcilable with the phenomena we see around us, and ultimately, we might go so far as to say, with the existence of society.*

Thus, then, in the miraculous we do not find a principle antagonistic to the natural order, but one in close relation to it, and apparently emanating from the same source, the Will of a beneficent Being. And the relations of miracles to the ordinary government of the world would seem to be this that God counteracts or suspends those ordinary manifestations of His Will whenever He desires to teach mankind some special lesson, and at no other time. His Almighty Will, directed by Infinite Wisdom, is the sole cause of all that is—Force and Law, and the matter which is subject to both. “Order is heaven’s first law,” and even the comparatively unimportant regularity of the mechanism of the visible universe is never disturbed, save when that same Will, guided by the same Infinite Wisdom, decrees that the necessities of a higher order require it.

* See above, p. 45.

CHAPTER V.

*CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN?—EXISTENCE OF OTHER
WORLDS BESIDE THE VISIBLE UNIVERSE.*

WE now proceed to another step in our demonstration. We have shown, or endeavoured to show, that no more rational explanation has been given of the origin of Force than Sir John Herschel's, which describes Force as derived from a "consciousness or will residing somewhere."* We have shown, or endeavoured to show, that Will, whether itself a "natural" force or not, is the originating cause of the forces which act within the limits of the material world. We proceed to discuss the question whether the intrusion of this disturbing element, reducible to no known laws, stands entirely alone, and is incapable of being explained, or whether there is any evidence of its being part of another order altogether. If we find grounds for concluding that there is a whole group of forces or orders, call them by what name we please, which are capable of controlling natural phenomena by means with which we are unacquainted, and according to laws which we cannot ascertain, we shall not only have a right to say that the terms "invariability of law," "immutability of natural order," and the like, are unscientific, because undemonstrated, but also that they are inaccurate, because contrary to ascertained facts. We shall divide our inquiry into two heads. First, we shall examine the influence of the intelligent and

* See note above, p. 35.

rational part of man's nature over the material part. Next we shall inquire into the evidence for a spiritual world—a world, that is, which is discernible ordinarily by intuition rather than observation, but which, if there be a point of contact between spirit and matter, may occasionally manifest its existence by facts cognizable by the senses.*

Of the influence of vital over ordinary chemical and cosmical forces we have already spoken. The physical life of animals and vegetables alike is sustained by forces which group the atoms of which their bodies are composed, according to laws entirely different from those by which inorganic substances are formed and kept together. Here, then, we have *one* force—*vital* force—which controls the ordinary action of the forces which govern inorganic matter, and which we may, therefore, presume to belong to a higher order. The ordinary influence of mind over matter is as obvious a truth. Within certain limits the physical forces at work in the bodies of men and animals are absolutely subject to those kindred powers, reason and instinct, which between them govern the whole animal creation. In man, too, as well as to a very limited extent in the lower animals, the latter of these powers is subordinate to the former, thus falling in exactly with the principle laid down by the late Professor Powell, of the successive subordination of laws “to others of a still higher generality, and constituting the true chain of universal causation which culminates in the sublime conception of the Cosmos.”† So far from this

* “The mind of man is a partaker of the thoughts of the Divine Mind. The intellect of man is a spark of the light by which the world was created” (Whewell, “Plurality of Worlds,” p. 379). This principle, which lies somewhat beyond our limits, contains the explanation of the phenomena to which we refer in this chapter.

† “Order of Nature,” p. 228.

principle excluding miracles, as he seems to suppose, it is the very principle upon which a belief in them is founded. According to this principle, matter is subject to will, and will to what we call mind, and mind to reason, and reason to the eternal principles of truth and falsehood, right and wrong,* and they, too, it may be, to the one universal law of eternal beneficence.†

We have seen that, as a fact, man's will, within certain limits, exercises a very considerable influence over natural phenomena, and that this exercise of will is quite incapable of being reduced to any known physical laws. To what class of laws, then, does volition belong? To some unknown part of the physical order? Some have contended that it does, but the boldest dogmatist in this department of inquiry will hardly venture to assert that this is proved, and certainly he must admit that if it *be* capable of being thus explained no one has yet shown how the task is to be accomplished. To the mental order? Then the principle for which we are contending is established. Whatever may be the true laws of mind—and we are not aware that they have as yet been scientifically ascertained—they would appear to belong to an order entirely external to the physical world, an order which is undeniably higher, since in every case it controls and directs the physical forces which are subject to its action. It may be objected that it does not in every case control or direct these physical forces; that, on the contrary, it is simple matter

* The perverted will of man often leads him to reason falsely, but, on the whole, this principle is a sound one. When the dictates of right reason are set aside, pernicious results invariably follow. And this disturbance of the moral world is, from the Christian point of view, the explanation of disturbances of the physical order.

† "God is love" (1 John iv. 8, 16). See also Chap. vi.

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of observation that the forces of mind can only act upon Nature within certain limits. There are hosts of physical laws which are entirely independent of their influence. Yet this objection is not conclusive. It is true that while physical law in some cases is subject to man's will, there are others in which man's will must submit to physical law. It is, therefore, of course possible that there is a point where the dominion of will stops short, and that outside that point physical law reigns supreme. But this is a mere possibility. It is not a demonstrated principle of science. The other alternative is just as conceivable and just as probable. For it is at least possible that the relation of living beings to the physical forces subjected to their action is similar to the relation of God to physical forces generally. Or we may put it thus: that if *some* physical forces are subjected to a variety of external powers 'confessedly finite, *all* physical forces may be subject to an external power which is infinite. We are, therefore, entitled to question on scientific grounds the axiom laid down by some eminent scientific men, that a disturbance of the natural order is impossible even at the fiat of Infinite Will. These submissions of Nature to Will may be reasonably held to be particular cases of a general law---the law by which God is wont, whether directly or by delegated power, to control the purely mechanical forces at work in the visible creation.

We may carry this argument a step farther. Not only is the action of mind over matter which we call Will a law confessedly at work in the visible universe, but in certain instances there is found an abnormal influence of mind over matter, which extends the action of mind into physical regions ordinarily removed from that action. We may instance the case of disease contracted through want of care

and forethought, the effect of uncleanness and bad sanitary arrangements, as possibly constituting a border-land between the ordinary and the extraordinary effects of mind upon matter. Here, however, the human will is to a certain extent operative in producing the result. The connection of cheerfulness with health is a still less obvious instance of the same law. Here there is apparently no conscious exercise of the will at all to produce the result arrived at. But the effect of the imagination in producing or even removing disease, or the effect of any sudden terror or fright, are clearly abnormal instances of the connection between mind and matter. There are numerous instances of persons who have lost their reason through the effect of tricks played upon them by others; that is to say, that brain disease has been induced by the action of one person's will upon another person's mind, and through the mind upon the body. The well-known story, again, of the paralytic who, on discovering that the house was on fire, ran without difficulty to a place of safety, although he had been incapable of moving for years, is an instance of an altogether exceptional influence of the mind over the body. The supposed miracle at Knock, in 1878, where a young lady, who had lost the use of her limbs for a long period, walked up the chapel where the apparition of the Virgin was believed to have occurred, is a case of the abnormal exercise of will. Point is given to this illustration by the fact that so great was the shock given to the system by this strong effort of will, that the young lady who made it died very shortly afterwards.* The numerous cases of people who have lost their reason, or, in other words, have induced brain disease by brooding over their troubles, or by an inordinate strain upon their mental faculties, are other instances of the same truth.

* This case was reported in the newspapers at the time.

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Thus, then, we find additional evidence for the conclusion that the exercise of will is only a particular case of a general law, the law of the empire of mind over matter. And if this *be* a general law, there is nothing irrational in our proceeding to the inference that there exists a Supreme Mind, to which the laws of the physical universe are subject: a Mind capable of designing them for its own purposes, and controlling them when it sees fit so to do.

Nor does this view of the case lack confirmation in facts of a more inexplicable character still. Some natural philosophers have accounted for the phenomena of electro-biology, spirit-rapping, and table-turning by the existence of a force called odic or odylic force, which acts upon matter directly, without the intervention of any of the media which are usually employed in such action.* We have seen† that there is invariably a point where will and matter, when they come in contact, do so without the intervention of a medium. Ordinarily speaking, this point is the nervous system of the man or animal. It is impossible, however, to prove that this is the only point at which contact can take place. And it may eventually be demonstrated that there exists an infinity of points at which the force of will, when put forth with sufficient intensity, can come in contact with matter, and reduce it to obedience to the external power. But if the influence of mind over matter be the

* The subject has not yet been thoroughly investigated, but the phenomena are too widely attested to be dismissed without inquiry. It is a case on which men of science have differed. Dr. Carpenter ("Mental Physiology," p. 549) rejects the idea of odylic force, and places it, in the case of persons, in the imagination of the individual. In the case of things he regards it as unconscious muscular action. Von Reichenbach takes the opposite view in his "Researches on Magnetism," translated by Professor Gregory.

† Page 46.

true explanation of the mysterious phenomena to which we have referred, the occurrence of what we call miracles becomes more intelligible than ever. What is possible to the human mind can hardly be impossible to that from which the human mind proceeds. If the theory we have just enunciated be true, a miracle is a fact of precisely the same order as clairvoyance, table-moving, or the control over another human will known as electro-biology; that is to say, it is an extraordinary influence of will over matter. The only difference is the sphere in which that influence is exercised. Man exerts it abnormally in that region only in which he could exercise it normally. God exercises it when and how and in what cases He pleases.

We proceed to our second point, the probability of the existence of a power of a yet more recondite order still, a power not ordinarily cognizable by observation, nor even to processes of reasoning, but relating to a world of which we are usually conscious by intuitive perceptions alone. This order of things is known by the name of spiritual or supernatural. And we would remark at the outset that if we are entitled to draw any inference from the universal verdict of humanity, the existence of such an order of things must be conceded to be certain. Those classes of persons excepted who refuse to accept any evidence but that of their senses, the human race in general has pronounced authoritatively in favour of such an order. We may laugh at the belief in ghosts, but it at least bears direct and striking testimony to a general recognition of the existence of the supernatural, and the simple fact that such qualities as wonder, awe, and reverence, and a sense of mystery, form part of our nature; and the almost universal tendency towards worship and faith of some kind in connection with such feelings, may be further held to

be strong presumptive evidence of the existence of an order which gives scope to their exercise. Why are these feelings implanted in us? Why have they exercised such universal influence upon mankind, if they relate to an order which does not exist? That they do not proceed altogether from the acknowledged perversion of the human intellect and will is clear from the fact that whatever crimes may have been imputed to the exercise of religious instinct,* it has been, on the whole, the strongest restraining force against evil that the world has known. And it may be added that it is an universal principle in Nature that no faculties are called into being unless an appropriate sphere is also provided for their employment.†

To this universal belief in the spiritual or supernatural, we may add the fact that we are not without some evidence of the existence of such a world. If we dismiss (and this is perhaps a strong measure) the greater part of the stories which are told concerning ghosts and apparitions to the region of fable,‡ there is at least one whole class of such apparitions which rests upon too strong testimony to be thus set aside. I refer to the well-authenticated cases, too numerous to be mentioned in detail, of the appearance of those at the point of death to relatives and friends at a distance, to whom their condition was absolutely unknown, and whose imagination could, therefore, in no way be responsible for the occurrence.§

* See Professor Clifford, "Ethics of Religion," 223, 225, 237.

† We have confined these remarks to the existence of a spiritual *order*. We have carried them further in Chap. vii.

‡ Several occurrences which have been related to the writer can hardly be so dismissed. And what may serve to strengthen the evidence for them is, that in every case there was a reasonable cause for the apparition.

§ The writer in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (9th. Ed. 1875, Art. *Apparitions*) regards the whole question as "one of evidence." But he also testifies to the fact that he himself saw an apparition of "a well-

As in some way or other physical media must have been employed in such apparitions, whether by impressing the image of the dying person upon the air, or upon the retina of the eye, we have here strong evidence for a class of facts demonstrating not only the reality of the supernatural, but its supremacy over the world of matter, and bearing witness to the existence of an order of things which renders the occurrence of miracles not only conceivable, but in a very high degree probable.

The second sight, as it is called, of the Scotch mountaineers* belongs to the same order. If it be a fact, it cannot be explained in any other way than by spiritual agencies outside the physical order. But the question is whether the existence of such a power has been satisfactorily established, or whether it is to be set down to credulity or superstition. The fact that it is not met with among busier and less imaginative races does not disprove its possibility. For it is quite conceivable that the mode of life of such races may tend to blunt those sensibilities which render men receptive to such impressions from the spirit-world.

known and learned member of an English University who was really dying at a place more than a hundred miles from the place where he was seen." A similar occurrence was related to the writer of this work by one who had seen it. The writer in the "Encyclopædia," moreover, acutely remarks that it is not the "anxious mourner" who, as a rule, beholds these apparitions. In every case which the writer of this work has heard or read of, the occurrence has been entirely unexpected. A similar story of the bombardment of Alexandria is told in the *Standard* of July 21st, 1882. Since these words were written some remarkable articles, by Mr. E. Gurney and Mr. F. W. H. Myers, have appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for this year, in which an immense number of cases of this description are recorded, duly authenticated with names and dates.

* Such powers are claimed by other nations beside the Scotch, though their second sight is best known.

Dr. Beattie rejects these phenomena on the ground that the Deity would not work a miracle for so frivolous a purpose as is served by many of these inexplicable visions. This is a question we are not concerned to discuss. Our present inquiry concerns the existence of powers and forces outside the physical order. If the stories of second sight be true, they can only be explained on this hypothesis. Whether they are true or not, we do not profess to decide. All we need for the purposes of our present argument to assert is, that they have not been proved to be false. Hence we are bound, from a scientific point of view, to suspend our judgment. And this attitude of reserve, whether it make little or much for miracles, is at least fatal to the position of those who would reject them without examination. The words of Dr. Johnson on this very question of second sight are words which may well be pondered on the general question which it is our object to discuss. "The second sight of the Hebrides," he says, "implies only the local frequency of a power which is nowhere totally unknown, and when we are unable to decide by antecedent reason, we must be content to yield to the force of testimony." *

There is another class of phenomena, more mysterious still, which we cannot exclude from this branch of the inquiry. These are the phenomena of Spiritualism. We do not pledge ourselves to the accuracy of the statements that have been made on the subject. Still less do we assert that the explanation of the alleged occurrences is the true one. Nor would we be understood to deny that among the Spiritualistic "manifestations" there has been an immense deal of credulity on the one hand and imposture on the other. But making all due allowance for these, there remains a *residuum* of facts which are difficult to

* "Journey to the Western Isles,"

explain. When we find men of judgment, character, and principle avowing publicly their conviction that neither can the alleged manifestations in all cases be denied, nor the explanation given be rejected at once without examination, we are bound to give these alleged facts a place in our argument. If true, and if correctly explained, they are absolute proofs of the existence of a spiritual world which can come in contact with matter, and under certain circumstances, and subject to certain laws, can produce results incapable of being reduced to the operation of natural causes. Whether true or false, the assertions of Spiritualists cannot be rejected without examination, for they simply point to an extension of what we know to be in existence, the power, that is, of mind and will over physical forces and laws.

That men of common sense have admitted these phenomena to be deserving of examination may be shown by the reports of speeches at the Church Congress of 1881. Dr. Thornton, who read a paper on that occasion,* says: "Whence all the strange phenomena? for, deduct what you will for delusion and deluded imagination, it is proved by the evidence of men of unimpeachable veracity and sound sense, non-Spiritualists as well as Spiritualists, that strange things *are* witnessed at the *séances*." And though he afterwards suggests that these "strange things" may be explained by a "simple human force" called either "psychic, biological, odylic, ectenic," he does so, it may be observed, with reserve. Another speaker† mentioned that a number of scientific men, with Lord Rayleigh—one of the most distinguished of their number—among them, agreed together to investigate the phenomena of Spiritualism, and that at the

* The readers of papers are very carefully selected by a committee chosen for that purpose.

† Mr. W. R. Browne.

end of their investigation they expressed themselves "unable to make up their minds whether the claims of Spiritualists were true or false." Canon Basil Wilberforce cites "Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace and Mr. William Crookes, the discoverer of the metal thallium and the radiometer," as declaring "that the main facts are as well established and as easily verifiable as any of the more exceptional phenomena which are not reduced to law." And in the article in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" we have a similar opinion quoted of the well-known mathematician, Professor De Morgan.* Now here we have a very remarkable *consensus* of testimony on the part of men well qualified to judge. With one mouth they have declared the assigned cause of spiritualist phenomena to be at least an open question. Some of them have gone considerably beyond that point. It must be clear to every one that when such extraordinary indications of the existence and power of spiritual forces as the phenomena of Spiritualism present are regarded as possible by persons capable of judging, we require stronger evidence than has yet been adduced before we venture authoritatively to set down miracles as antecedently impossible.

* He says, "I am perfectly convinced, in a manner which should make unbelief impossible, that I have seen things called spiritual which cannot be taken by a rational being to be capable of explanation by imposture, coincidence, or mistake." The writer of the article concludes, "we must leave the question *sub judice*."

CHAPTER VI.

*CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN? THE SUBORDINATION
OF THE MATERIAL TO THE MORAL.*

BEFORE entering upon a fresh branch of the subject, it will be well to recapitulate the results to which we have already attained. We have remarked upon the evidence of design in the material world.* We have contended that not only does that evidence of design prove a purpose in the creation of the visible universe, but that we may reasonably conjecture what that purpose was,—the happiness of living creatures,† and more especially of man. On the supposition that the happiness of intelligent beings was the object of the world's creation, we held it not unreasonable to suppose that the visible order might be suspended, if necessary, to attain that object. We showed that a fact, *not* of the physical order, had intruded into the physical world, had worked great interferences there, and had largely diminished the sum of the happiness of intelligent beings, a happiness which the constitution of the physical universe was calculated to promote. Such a supposition, even on the most mechanical theory of the universe, might, we argued, not only justify, but even im-

* In Chap. iii.

† It may be disputed whether in the happiness of the lower animals there is a balance of pleasure or pain. But the majority would most probably admit that the pleasure preponderated.

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peratively demand, some interference with the natural order. And we proceeded, in the next chapter, to give reasons for our belief that the mechanical theory of the universe, so strongly insisted on in some quarters, derived no support, either from the evidence of physical facts or the judgment of competent scientific men. The forces of Nature, so far as evidence goes, are a manifestation of the will of some controlling power. And not only so, but we have, as we shall show in the following chapter, sufficient grounds for supposing that the physical order forms but one, and that probably the lowest, of a whole group of orders, vital, moral, spiritual, the existence of which may be observed or inferred, orders which are governed by laws of their own, coming into contact with, and often largely modifying, the action of physical forces. Our object now is to prove, not only that this may be so, but that there are valid reasons for believing that it *must* be so; that as physical Nature is dominated by Force, and Force is subject to Will, so Will is subject to Purpose, and Purpose to some deeper moral end which the whole creation was intended to subserve.

One of the most common mistakes of men of science of a certain class* is to regard the physical universe and its forces as an end in itself. We may venture to use a well-known phrase, and pronounce this opinion to be, not only a violent assumption, but absolutely "contrary to experience." If the world and all that it contains be a machine, it is a machine which is designed for an object. What that object is, we

* We say "of a certain class" because there are two classes of scientific men. The one investigates nature, but cannot or will not penetrate beyond nature; the other, consisting of men like Herschel, Whewell, Sedgwick, Brewster, Faraday, Clerk-Maxwell, and others still living, can advance from the material and visible world to that which lies beyond and around it.

will endeavour in the present chapter to show. If we may not assume, with Paley, that design implies a designer, at least we are entitled to say that though his argument has been scoffed at, it has never been answered. It would certainly be impossible to assume, with scientific men of the school which has just been mentioned, that design implies *no* designer. No one has a right to speak as though the absence of a rigid demonstration of any hypothesis implies the truth of its contrary. We are therefore on unassailable ground when we lay down the principle that there are extremely strong grounds for supposing that design implies a Designer. And further, there are also strong grounds for believing that a Designer implies a Purpose. And the history of the world corroborates the Christian theory that this purpose is the moral and spiritual elevation of mankind, this being the only means of securing man's ultimate happiness.

If this be so, we shall not be unable to find signs in the physical universe of the supremacy of the moral order. We shall find the signs of this supremacy (1) in the mind and conscience of man, (2) in the comparative permanence of the facts relating to the moral and material order respectively, and (3) in the evidences of power over nature displayed by moral principles.

I. We find this supremacy evidenced by the mind and conscience of man himself. His very superiority to the animals is derived from an order above the physical. The possession of reason elevates him above creatures far more powerful than himself, and enables him to tame them to his will,* or if they prove untamable, to destroy them. We have no space to enter into the well-known facts of the

* As is strikingly exemplified in the case of the elephant, the most powerful and also the most sagacious of the brute creation, unless, as

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progressive nature of man, his power to start from the point his progenitors have attained, as contrasted with the immobility of animal instincts. But we find the same truth implied in his assiduous cultivation of his higher nature. Why all this talk about education, why these continued efforts after political and social progress, if the blindest instincts of the animal are part of an order as elevated as the promptings of the highest human intelligence? It is impossible to take even the most superficial view of human life, and fail to see that there is a power, not of the visible world, but clearly above it, which exercises the vastest influence over man, and through him upon the whole condition of things around him.

This power, as we have seen, derives itself from the exercise of will. But will in man, again, is directed, not by itself, but by another power, reason. And reason belongs, not to the order of Nature, but of mind. It is beside the point to argue that animals display faculties akin to reason, for in their case, also, the exercise of reason, or what almost amounts to it, belongs to another category than the forces which act on inanimate nature. Life itself, indeed, is a fact of an order beyond the purely mechanical. Thus we are confronted with three forces—life, will, and reason—all of which stand outside the order of pure physical force. And they are also independent of one another. For as we have remarked that the reason conditions the use of the will, so the will also conditions the use of the reason, by directing, as it frequently does, the subjects to which the latter is to be applied, and by prompting it to the labour necessary to reach its object. Nor is this all. Man is capable of acting against reason, if he chooses—a further proof of the independence of the three powers. Sir John Lubbock tells us, and not without reason, he must yield the palm, in this latter respect, to the ant.

pendent nature of the forces Will and Reason. But paramount over the sphere both of reason and will, acting in the sphere which life opens out to it, is the sense of duty, of right and wrong, which dominates the intellect and the will alike, assigning to each its function, and being itself the end to which their operation is directed.* Without this, man were a chaos, a monstrosity. Only by due obedience to the moral law implanted within him, can he be said truly to live. Thus man's nature is itself a witness to the fact that in him the material is the lowest part of his organization. Matter is subject to mind, and mind is co-equal with will, and will, when properly exercised, is subject to the sense of duty; so, too, we may infer that mind ruled matter in the creation and constitution of the world, that will interacted and still interacts with mind, and that over all rules purpose, and purpose is subjected to love.

II. Our next point is the indestructibility of the moral, the destructibility of the physical, order. The science of geology tells us that there was a time when the present contrivances for the support of life were not in being, and observation and reason show that it is by no means incredible that they shall one day cease to be.† The material order, then, is temporary, and subject to change, but the moral order is eternal and indestructible. "Before

* The power of rebelling against the moral sense does not militate against this conclusion. The fact of sin must be admitted, and so must the fact that the transgression of the moral law brings *ipso facto* its penalties with it. The departure of man from the true law of his being is an ascertained fact. But the disorders of the world prove the existence and the importance of the law from which he has departed.

† "Within a finite period of time past, the earth has been, and within a finite period of time to come, the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of men as at present constituted" (Sir W. Thomson.)

the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made" truth was truth, and justice, justice, and righteousness, righteousness. And so they will continue to be were the whole visible world to pass away. Here, then, is a remarkable instance of the truth of St. Paul's saying, "The things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal." The visible universe is but a contrivance for a special end. The moral universe contains the end itself. Thus, then, we learn what the world really is, and for what it was intended. It is no mere exquisitely planned machine, admirably as it is designed. It is a great school wherein moral virtue is to be taught. The history of mankind and of the individual presents to us the world as a great system of probation, in which vast moral problems are worked out.* In the individual we see in this life only one or two stages of the process. The rest are carried on in worlds beyond our ken. But as regards humanity in general, if we can discern on the one hand the baneful results of the violation of moral law, on the other we may perceive its inherent supremacy, and thus may learn to forecast its ultimate triumph. That the world existed for such a discipline as this; that even evil itself may have been necessary to the working out of the great problem; that pain and suffering were among the factors employed in its solution, and that the ultimate end of all will be a "new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," are at least, it must be confessed, possibilities.

It must be admitted that there is nothing impossible or even unreasonable in suppositions such as these. The physical order, as we have seen, exists by no necessity. It has undergone, as science proves, the most surprising

* See Butler, "Analogy," Part i.

modifications. There is no proof whatever that it cannot be replaced by another. But an alteration of the moral order is absolutely inconceivable. We cannot imagine a world in which right could be wrong, or wrong right, in which falsehood, injustice, unrighteousness, could become tolerable or commendable. Therefore we may fairly learn to regard the visible universe as only a handmaid to the moral order, and the arrangements of the former as liable to be suspended, counteracted, remodelled entirely, as may be consistent with the necessities of the latter.

III. There are yet further reasons which may be adduced in behalf of this view. The moral order displays unquestionable evidences of its power over the physical. The method of induction consists, as we have seen,* in inferring general principles from a wide observation of facts of various kinds. We shall find that this subordination of material laws to laws non-material displays itself in many directions. We have spoken of pain as a physical fact. But how frequently has even physical pain a moral origin? The pain of mere disease may have been caused by the wrong-doing of him who suffers it, or it may have been the act of someone else, or the disease may be traceable to the misconduct of one of the progenitors of the sufferer. Pain on a larger scale, the pain of body and mind, each reacting on the other, caused by a colliery explosion, yet due to the folly or recklessness of a single man, is the result not of physical, but of moral causes. The widespread misery caused by an invading army,† the fury and

* Page 33.

† In this generation the horrors of war are mitigated, though this is compensated for by a keener sense of them. We should not, however, forget the frightful misery produced in past times by a Spanish Fury or a Sack of Magdeburg.

desperation caused by centuries of oppression, and culminating in the results of a successful or unsuccessful revolt, are other instances of physical results on a large scale, flowing from moral causes. Another class of phenomena are illustrative of the same truth. The present orderly state of society, whether due to Christianity or not, has certainly mitigated the sorrows and sufferings of mankind. Seven to ten centuries ago want and famine stalked about the land, because men had not learned to restrain their passions, and either foreign invasion or domestic disorder swept the land of its able-bodied men, and left the fields untilled and the flocks untended, so that disease and starvation thinned still more the remnant that was left. Man has learned wisdom by experience, or, as is at least equally probable, by the teaching of Christ.* Therefore famines are comparatively rare, want is usually a man's fault rather than his misfortune, and even disease is largely yielding to the remedial agencies which our improved circumstances have rendered possible.

The same may be said of the process of discovery. Due in the first instance to moral causes, it produces daily larger physical results. That discovery *is* largely due to moral causes it will not be difficult to show. The gradual improvement in morals, which has converted the world from a vast battlefield into something far more like a gigantic farm or workshop, has given men time and security to devote their thoughts to augmenting rather than diminishing the store of human prosperity. The inventions of which modern society enjoys the benefit have largely affected the physical condition of the world. Not only has machinery multiplied

* If it be not due to Christ's teaching, it is somewhat strange that man's experience had not led him to these conclusions before Christ came.

a thousandfold the power of the worker, and diminished the cost of production, thus tending to ameliorate the condition of the masses, but facilities of locomotion have brought the ends of the earth together, and thus ameliorated their condition yet more. The products of each land find ready access to the most distant markets. The cultivator of the soil betakes himself to the virgin prairie, from whence the food, raised with the smallest possible expenditure of time and trouble, can be readily transported to feed the hungry in the most distant land. The confusion and distress caused in some places by this bloodless revolution sink into insignificance beside the blessings it brings to a thousand homes. Thus the increase of general prosperity which unquestionably has taken place is due, in the first instance, to moral conditions. But this is not all. By moral conditions alone is its continuance guaranteed. Reverse the moral conditions of society, spread anarchy, disorder, and conflict where peace now reigns, and how soon would the most fruitful fields be reduced to desolation, and all our vast scientific progress be rendered powerful only for harm? And what that harm might be in the present state of human knowledge passes imagination. No Attila the Hun, deserving the name of the Scourge of God; no William the Conqueror, laying the whole of the north of England waste for an unsuccessful rebellion,—no other ferocious conqueror whom history can conjure up from the past could compare in his ravages with what has now become possible from the spread of modern science. And nothing stands between us and the ferocity which would destroy the largest cities in a few hours,* would convert the fairest districts of the earth into deserts, which would

* As, for instance, the destruction of Alexandria, which has taken place while this book was in writing, July 1882; or the plot, so

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in a little time entirely reduce the earth and all its inhabitants to a condition of primitive savagery, or worse, but the moral training that mankind have received, and by which they are controlled.

Moral force, therefore, it is clear, plays no small part in the visible universe. And this it does by subordinating physical forces to its action. The infringement of the moral order brings proportionate physical punishments in its train. Obedience to the moral order tends to promote prosperity, and prosperity itself exercises an extraordinary influence over the course of nature, so far as it is subject to man. We conclude that there can be nothing unreasonable in the supposition we have already hazarded* that these phenomena present particular cases of a general law. If physical forces are seen to be subjected here to the moral principles of man, to his sense of right and wrong, of what is due to others from himself, it is surely not improbable that this is a law which holds generally; that physical forces do but exist for moral ends; and that in their working they are subject to the decrees of the Divine Mind in respect of what is best for the higher welfare of Its creatures.

Nor are we confined to the argument that it may be so. If we are not actually entitled to say that it *must* be so, there are not wanting very strong grounds indeed for the assertion. Not only the partial subordination of the physical world to man as a moral agent, but the whole plan and purpose of creation, leads us to the conviction that the physical world is but the servant of the moral. If we see a chain of causation in nature which largely subordinates physical to moral laws; if physical nature happily discovered in time, to lay one-fourth of London in ruins by dynamite, in the present year (1883).

* P. 53.

seems to have been brought into being to promote the happiness of the animate creation, and, in an especial sense, of man; and if that happiness can only be rendered perfect and permanent by the operation of moral causes,—then, surely, we are justified in saying that there is at least a high degree of probability, even though it may not amount to absolute certainty, that the laws of the physical universe, as a whole, are necessarily controlled by the needs of that part of the visible creation whose excellence and happiness depend on the moral order. And this conclusion is in keeping with man's most cherished intuitions. If there be one idea more firmly fixed in us than another, it is the superiority of the moral to the material order in ourselves. And the same idea is inherent in most of us in reference to the Universe. Even those who are most materialistic in their conceptions are forced to regard justice and righteousness and truth and love as higher principles than those of gravitation, attraction, repulsion, conservation of energy. They may seek to drive away the conviction that anything exists beyond what they see, or can infer from what they see, but it continually returns. The vision of the higher order confronts them when they have to speak of reverence and duty. Reverence to whom? duty to what? The machine theory breaks down under them when they rise to considerations like these, and they begin to discern a higher order beyond it. The material, after all, is but a means. The mind of man could only rest in a moral order as an end. The only rational conception of the Cosmos is that which regards the material universe as an instrument in the hands of Divine beneficence and love.

CHAPTER VII.

*CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN?**THE SPIRITUAL ORDER AND A PERSONAL GOD.*

I N our last chapter we arrived at the conclusion that there was reason to suppose the existence of an eternal, indestructible moral order, with invariable laws, the breach of which caused both moral and physical anguish and disturbance, and that to this order the lower laws of the physical world are no more than accessories. We now proceed to remark that this moral order, with its rigid code of right and wrong, presupposes the existence of living beings, capable of comprehending and obeying such an order. Whether these beings belong to what we call the realm of Nature or not is perfectly immaterial. The moral order has no necessary connection with Nature in the proper sense of the word. If, however, we should be reminded that the converse is true, that Nature has no necessary connection with morals, we may reply that it must be remembered that this general principle is largely modified by the introduction into Nature of a being like man, who belongs at once to both worlds. As we have already seen, there is evidence of the existence, outside this world, not only of forces, but of beings altogether independent of Nature, though capable at will of exercising power over Nature. Professor Balfour Stewart,* accomplished man

* In the paper quoted above, p. 36.

of science as he is, does not hesitate to admit the possibility and even the probability that the operations of Nature are carried on through the instrumentality of angelic intelligences. The existence, then, of a spiritual order—by which name we distinguish from the moral order that universe of sentient beings whose law the moral order is,—if not demonstrated, is at least shown to be not altogether improbable. And from these intelligences we advance to their head. A material world alone might have a materialistic origin. A moral order must be referred to a moral governor. A spirit-world must be ascribed to the operation of a spirit. And this is what Christianity teaches us. God is Spirit,* says Jesus Christ. He may be contradicted, but His Words cannot be disproved. Beside the evidence for the supernatural, to which we have just referred, the existence of spiritual forces, as we have seen, has been too clearly demonstrated in the history of man to permit us to ignore them. The longings and yearnings of mankind from the beginning; the instincts of awe, of adoration, of prayer; the worship paid to a being above Nature, are witnesses for the existence of something above the visible frame of things, which corresponds to these aspirations. In view of the fact that no other instance of faculties unused is to be found in nature, we may fairly call upon those who assert that they thus exist without an object to explain this singular and unique phenomenon.† They may also be asked to explain how it is that in the idea

* This is the best translation of St. John iv. 24.

† See above, p. 73. It is beside the point to instance the fact that rudimentary organs, *e.g.*, the teats in man, exist for no purpose. Our point here is not only that the organs exist, but that *in no case* have they an object. The existence of rudimentary organs in Nature merely implies that there is no use for them in that particular individual or species,

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of God these faculties find at once their highest exercise and their fullest satisfaction.

And God has usually been conceived of as a Person. By this phrase is meant a being whose relations with others is moral rather than mechanical;* that is to say, One Who attaches more importance to conduct than to mere existence, Who seeks rather to implant goodness, righteousness, love, in His creatures, than simply to provide them with food, and keep the vital forces of the body in action; One Who regards life itself in His creatures as more a means than an end, the end being the happiness of millions of living creatures, attained by obedience to His moral law; One Who for this purpose assumes an attitude of perpetual watchfulness, perpetual care, in order that all things necessary to the end He proposes to Himself may be attained. The belief in such a Being, it is true, has been much ridiculed of late. A recent writer of high literary repute† has made very merry with the belief that "God is a Person," and with two very absurd personages, Bishops of the Church of England, who have ventured to maintain so antiquated a doctrine.‡ But, with submission, we would venture to suggest that such mirth is a little out of place on

* "The main business of natural philosophy is to argue from phenomena *without feigning hypotheses*, and to deduce causes from effects until we come to the first cause, *which certainly is not mechanical*" (Newton, "Optics," p. 384).

† Mr. M. Arnold, in his "Literature and Dogma," and "God and the Bible."

‡ "An extraneous and superhuman God is nothing more than an extraneous and supernatural self, a subjective being placed, by transgressing its limits, above the objective nature of man" (Ludwig Feuerbach. See Bucherer, "Force and Matter"). Whence we may derive the origin of Mr. Arnold's favourite doctrine, that the God of theologians is but a "magnified and non-natural man."

a subject of this kind. For, in the first place, it is by no means a settled point that God is *not* a Person; and secondly, if it be not so settled, then surely the subject is no jesting matter, but the most solemn and serious that can occupy the attention of mankind.

But in truth argument is thrown away upon persons capable of jesting on such a subject. If they think that matters which go down to the roots of our being—of *all* being—can be disposed of by a little airy, fashionable trifling, they had best be left to themselves till they have discovered the real nature of the question with which they are dealing. Some time or other a sense of the infinite reality and earnestness of life must dawn on the most frivolous. And this sense of reality and earnestness—this insatiable craving to get at the root of things—can find no more thorough satisfaction than in the contemplation of the Great First Cause of all that is. What is He, and who is He? Shall we listen to the modern philosopher who regards Him as the great Central Force that keeps all visible things going? Or shall we listen to a voice within which tells us that He is this and far more—that He is the Source of our being*—that He is the fountain of all excellence—that all pain, misery, evil of every sort, comes from our deviating from the perfection of His laws? Shall we believe that

* “If an elaborate bodily organization issues in the life of myself, a person, I cannot avoid concluding that there is at the bottom of it the intention of a Personal Being that I should live. From personality at the one end, I infer personality at the other” (Mozley, “Bampton Lectures,” p. 99). This is at least as reasonable a theory as the idea, borrowed from the old Gnostic teacher Basilides, that personality, and even existence itself, implies limitation, and that the Supreme Power must, therefore, be impersonal and non-existent. It is surely more rational to believe that the Supreme Being should be the expansion rather than the negation of all that is. And it should be remembered that the very

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He is capable of care, not only for the general well-being of His creation in a mass, but for the particular well-being of each individual that composes it? Shall we believe that the system of this universe is so lightly poised by His Eternal Will that the cry of a single human being in suffering has power to affect it?—that not even a bird falls to the ground without the knowledge of Him who made it? These are the alternatives which are placed before us. They are quite important enough to make it the business of our lives to decide them.

It is granted that we have not demonstrated—that we cannot demonstrate—the existence of such a being. The point is not one capable of demonstration. If such a Being exist, then He is the first principle of all things, and you do not demonstrate first principles, you assume them. You can only demonstrate them to those who fail to see them by pointing out the difficulties, the absurdities, the dangers, into which they fall who reject them.* This is the only way to test the soundness of the principle in the present instance. It may seem as though that principle could be

Nature of God imposes limitations on Himself. His moral excellences forbid to Him the power of doing evil, as well as impose on Him the necessity of those relations of love and care to His creatures, which, as opposed to mere mechanical relations, are expressed by the word *Person*.

* “Undoubtedly the doctrines of false religions have extracted remarkable action out of human nature, especially the doctrines of Oriental religions. The Hindoo doctrine of absorption, *e.g.*, has produced a great deal of extraordinary action. But what sort of action is it? Is its action upon the scale of our whole moral nature worthy of that nature, or the fulfilment of the law, as Scripture calls it? No, it is such wild, eccentric, one-sided energy of the erratic will as is more allied to frenzy than morals. The fruits of the doctrine of absorption are gigantic feats of self-torture and self-stupefaction, ending in themselves, and unconnected with charity to man, a fruit worthy of its source” (Mozley, “Bampton Lectures,” p. 187).

lightly enough given up in the present generation. There are numbers of men who have abandoned the belief in a God, who are, it is said, to all appearance as moral, as charitable, as impartial, as tender to those who suffer, as unselfishly devoted to the interests of humanity, as the most earnest Christian can be. This is perhaps open to question, but supposing it were true, what then? We have still to ask, what has made them so—their own creed or the creed they reject? They cannot cast off the habits of thought in which they have been trained, nor can they resist the current of feeling in the midst of which they find themselves. But train up a whole generation in their principles; tell them that there is no right and wrong but the collective voice of humanity, no future life to set right what is wrong in this, no eternal principles of right to be vindicated by a Judge of all the earth, no standard of principle beyond the greatest happiness (in this life) of the greatest number, and then see what would be the result. Logically, it would seem to be Nihilism, and nothing else, a system which, according to one of its most trusted teachers, aims at the abolition not only of the fear of God, but of “science, civilization, property, marriage, morality, and justice,” which, he hopes, when the first of these objects is reached, will “snap asunder like threads.”* No eloquent words about the

* Such is the utterance, reported in the newspapers, of one of the leading apostles of Nihilism. Nor is another writer (Van Denslow) much behind in the race of the new morality. Nature does not disapprove of lying, for she endows animals with “the faculty of deception.” The need of truthfulness is a doctrine laid down by the strong to the disadvantage of the weak. So is the precept, “Thou shalt not steal.” While the laws against unchastity are simply in the interest of those who, in the earlier periods of civilization, could afford to keep their own women, against the poor who could not.

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dignity of man, no impassioned exhortations to sink the interests of the individual in the race, no sounding periods about the true God being the idea or the aggregate of humanity, would prevent the relapse into brutal selfishness which would accompany the withdrawal of all conceptions of moral government and training, of judgment hereafter, of an unerring Judge, who will render to all according to their deeds. And if it be replied that nothing is easier than to prophesy, it may be rejoined that this is not matter of prophecy, it is matter of experience. History tells us that nowhere has individual and social morality sunk so low as where the existence of God as a moral Ruler has been denied.*

The question, therefore, is not whether we can *prove* that there is a God, it is whether we can discern Him. If it be urged that because many have failed to discern Him He does not exist, the answer is that nothing is more clear than that man's intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties are all more or less defective, and that it is to such defective perceptions that the failure to discern God is owing. But it is also to such defective perceptions that all the evil in the universe is due. And it is only by a correction of those defective perceptions that this evil can be undone. No adequate motive has yet been found to prevent man

* "Let us suppose for a moment Christian doctrine obliterated, and mankind starting afresh without it, with only the belief in a Benevolent Deity [this is more than our latest opponents will admit], and a high moral code. With the fact before us of what has been the working power of doctrine upon man's heart, and what has been the weakness of our moral nature without doctrine, could we commit mankind to a moral Deism [how much more is this true of a moral Atheism?] without trembling for the result? Could we look forward without dismay to the loss of this practical force?" (Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 191).

from indulging his passions but the belief in a power or powers beyond this world capable of punishing his misconduct. No view of these powers which did not ultimately reduce them to a single Power has been found capable of being sustained. Thus the moral, even more than the intellectual, faculties of mankind have led the vast majority to the conclusion that the existence of a personal God was the only assumption on which the phenomena of the world could be explained.

But observation and reasoning are not the only data whereby this problem is to be determined. There exist other faculties, belonging to man's spiritual nature, with which we come into contact with beings of the spiritual order. The existence of the spiritual instincts, to which reference has already been made, cannot be denied. They are to be found alike in all races of man, in all climes, under all circumstances. They are as common among the most highly civilized, among persons of the highest intellectual culture, as among the most simple and ignorant. They are to be found in the moral constitution of every child. To no idea does the child's mind respond so readily as to that of a great and wise Ruler of the world, who made all that is, and to whom the highest devotion of our souls is owing, yet who is also a kind and tender Father, who cares for the slightest wants of His children with a parent's love. Were the idea a gradual growth of reflection and reason, it would be found too vast for the infant intellect to grasp, too far removed from practical life to be realized in action. The readiness with which the infant mind responds to an idea of such immensity, the spontaneous way in which the idea of moral obligation and obedience connected with such a Being is at once acknowledged and acted upon, is most difficult to explain, except on the principle we have

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just laid down, namely, that it is the only assumption consistent either with man's existence, his nature, or his duty.

It is not, as we have already intimated, our intention to enter at length into the arguments for the existence of a personal God. It is quite sufficient for our present purpose to show that there are very strong grounds indeed for believing that there is such a Being, and that the physical universe is but one, and that the lowest with which we are acquainted, of the manifestations of His will and power. In other words, there is a strong probability that the Christian doctrine concerning God, namely, that He is spirit, and He is love, is the true one. The former phrase explains His mode of being, the second His mode of action. And the two combined present to us not only a being whose existence soars up far into the immaterial and invisible, but a loving Father, who enters into personal relations—by which we mean relations involving tenderness and care—with every living being He has created. With such a being the welfare of all living creatures would be a primary object. But inasmuch as that welfare depends upon their obedience to His will, His chief care would be to train them to such obedience. That He has given them power to disobey is a point which need not be argued. The existence of evil is a standing proof of the fact. It would then naturally become a first consideration with Him to win them back from this disobedience, especially since, if persisted in, it must needs bring results of incalculable gravity in its train. To this purpose, we might well believe, all lesser purposes would be subordinate. The laws which He has laid down with such a perfect subordination of means to ends for the securing the temporal happiness of His creatures, would, of course, require

no modification for their own proper object. But did higher necessities require it, we may be sure their uniformity, however necessary under ordinary circumstances, would not be allowed to stand in the way. Did the admitted disorganization of the moral world, which may be seen to have overflowed into the physical universe, demand some departure from the accustomed action of forces, however wisely adapted to their ends, such departure would, as a matter of course, take place. Does God desire to strike mankind with awe, and to manifest His will to them? What more natural or reasonable method than by arresting in some way the course of nature, which is but the obedient instrument of His will? Does He desire to give His credentials to His messengers? What more obvious than to allow them to show, by their power over visible things, their close connection with Him, whose words they have been commissioned to speak? Of the best way of remedying the defects in man's moral and spiritual condition we are utterly incompetent judges. Nor are we able to suggest any alternative mode to that which has just been suggested by which God could reclaim man, than by infusing into man's heart an irresistible conviction of the moral and spiritual truth to be inculcated. But inasmuch as this has not been done, and would, if it had been done, have rendered all systems of moral training whatever not only unnecessary, but impossible, it may be dismissed from the inquiry. Assuming, then, that there is a personal God,—and we have given some strong reasons for supposing that there is such a Being,—it would appear to be the most reasonable and probable *hypothesis* that He may see fit to manifest His will to man by counteractions or suspensions of the laws which He has established, counteractions or suspensions capable of being effected by

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no other will than His. Since the counteraction of law by law, the subordination of lower laws to higher, are, as we have shown, among the first principles of His action, we should expect them to be carried out whenever a manifestation of His will were necessary. Nor does this reasoning hold good of miracles only. It holds good of special providences also. If it be God's will that His moral and personal relation to His creatures should be felt by each one of them, He would naturally arrange the order of nature so that, under certain conditions, His special and providential care of each living being should be capable of being felt and recognized. It is true that we are as yet very ignorant what those conditions are. Many events have been ascribed to the special care of a superintending Providence which are due to the working of ordinary laws. Still, there are many others which are incapable of being so explained ; and many others, still, where the working of ordinary forces seems clearly to have been so overruled and contrived by the Will which holds them all in its hand, as to make clear its providential care over the creature who has implored its special exercise.* Hence, then, reasoning inductively, we have proved in former chapters that such counteractions and suspensions are a part of the laws by which this world is governed. In the present chapter we have briefly indicated the evidence for the existence of a personal God. We have shown that on the assumption of His existence, there exist most weighty reasons why it

* Instances of this can be seen in the action of the human will. The assassin casts the bomb or fires the pistol which is to take away life. The forces are natural, but the moment when they are to be put in force is due to the action of will alone. So must we ascribe to Infinite Wisdom the selection of the moment when natural forces will bring about a happy escape or a terrible catastrophe. See below, Chap. xiii.

should be necessary for Him to communicate with His creatures. And it has also been made evident that no method could be imagined more natural and reasonable of making such communication than by modifications or suspensions of the order of nature, since that order is but the manifestation of His will. The method we have taken is purely scientific. We have argued from induction to the existence of various orders of force which control the visible order. We have reversed the process,* and shown that the assumption to which we have been led would account for the phenomena which have been observed. And though we might go so far as to say that we have shown that there is a high degree of probability in favour of miracles under the present circumstances of mankind, we content ourselves with the assertion that we have shown the theory of their impossibility to be utterly destitute of foundation.†

* Whewell, "Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences," II., 449. Also Newton, "Optics," pp. 380, 381.

† It may be remarked that one of the greatest of modern philosophers, Kant, has felt compelled to avoid any such assumption as that miracles are impossible.

CHAPTER VIII.

*CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN? NATURE ITSELF
A MIRACLE.*

ONE further point remains to be urged in connection with this branch of our subject. In treating of it, we will recur for a moment to our definition of a miracle. We have defined it to be "an exception to the observed order of nature, brought about by God in order to reveal His will or purpose." Had it not been for our argument in the present chapter, we should have added the words "to man" to this definition. For such is the nature of the miracles we are concerned to defend. They are the miracles connected with Revelation, the wonders wrought in order to assure mankind that they who proclaimed the truths it was God's will to make known, were doing so by His command—that they had His full sanction for what they said and did. But God has manifested His will in other ways than by miracles of this kind. Every act whereby His power is put forth above and beyond the course of nature is a manifestation of His will and purpose. It will strengthen the cause for which we are contending, if we are able to show that the miracles whose genuineness we are upholding, are only particular cases of a general law,—a law whereby at certain times, and for fitting reasons, the present observed order of nature has been departed from. Thus we shall

advance another step in our argument. We have adduced several grounds for believing that miracles are reconcilable with the order of nature, and probable in themselves. We have shown that the assumption of the existence of a personal God satisfactorily accounts for them. We proceed to show that the miraculous, regarded as a deviation from or a control over the operation of existing physical laws, is an actual observed fact in nature. And here we do but follow in the path of Bishop Butler. That most acute of all the defenders of Christianity saw at once that a miracle, as a departure from the ordinary course of nature, was not contrary to experience, but in accordance with it.* For such a departure, he argues, there must have been at the creation of the world. The process which called all things that are into being, must have been one altogether different from that which was established to keep them in being. Such a departure, again, there must have been when man was first placed upon the earth. It is true that the advance of science since Bishop Butler's day has caused this line of argument to be disputed. We are now told† that there is no evidence of creation. Change, indeed, there is, infinite

* "Analogy," Part I., Chap. ii.

† Powell, "Order of Nature," p. 250. Mr. Darwin, however, who may be regarded as in some sense a disciple of Mr. Powell, acknowledges the descent of animals and plants from four or five progenitors each ("Origin of Species," Chapter xiv.). Dr. Louis Buchner, whose work on "Force and Matter" has been translated into English, tells us that "Nature knows neither a supernatural beginning nor a supernatural continuance. Nature, the all gendering and the all devouring, is its own beginning and end, birth and death. She produced man by her own power, and takes him again." We read elsewhere, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the image of God made He man." This is, we presume, dogma; while Dr. Buchner's assertions, above quoted, are not. Yet it may be questioned whether Dr. Buchner knows any more about the matter than Moses did.

change, but no "beginning properly so called." And it is true that we learn from geology the truth that there has been a gradual progress of the condition of the globe from the time when "the earth was without form, and void" to the present day. Astronomy, too, as it advances, leads many to the belief that all the vast orbs which people the sky have been formed out of glowing matter, that the smaller they are, the sooner they cool down, and that it is only during this process of cooling that they are fit to sustain animal life such as we find upon this earth.* But this, after all, does but remove the difficulty a step further. How did they become glowing matter? Whence was the central fire kindled from which they (as is now supposed) were cast forth? Who laid down the arbitrary† laws by which their motions were directed? That it were only in accordance with the most rational conceptions of God, that He should act with regularity and order, we have already seen. The orderly development of the course of Nature was therefore to be anticipated rather than any abrupt breaks of continuity.‡ But we are as little in a position to dispense with the first creative act as ever, and how far soever we put it back, still, when it occurred, it was an act altogether outside the present course of Nature.

* Dr. Whewell, "Plurality of Worlds," Chap. x. Sir Charles Lyell denies that the worlds were framed of glowing matter. "The metamorphic rocks have not been formed by crystallization from a state of fusion, or in the dry way, but they have been formed from liquid solutions, or in the wet way."—*Bath Address*.

† See Chap. iii. So says the President of the Geological Society, Mr. Hamilton, in his Anniversary Address in 1865. See *Quart. Journ. of Geol. Soc.*, May, 1866.

‡ We have contended below that there *are* breaks of continuity in Nature. We do not desire to be understood here to admit that there are not. What we are willing to admit is that those breaks are not abrupt.

Moreover, with regard to the various periods in the earth's history which geology has discovered, there are not wanting traces of creative energy. Breaks of continuity there are, although not so abrupt as to preclude the idea of plan. That there is a progressive advance in the scale of being, and that the successive geologic periods were designed to promote this advance, is undeniable.* But how were these breaks brought about? All the evidence shows that there was no gradual development from one period into another. Each period had its distinct characteristics, and was fitted for the support of distinct species of living creatures and plants. And each period was marked off by a violent disturbance of Nature, from that which preceded and followed.

The same may be said of the origin of species. Mr. Darwin must be admitted on all hands to have proved that all species are modelled on a few types; that these types have been gradually evolved from a primitive origin of extreme simplicity, and that various species are not absolutely independent creations, but various and very slight modifications of the original type. In a word, Mr. Darwin has proved the economy of means to ends in Nature. He has shown that in all her processes she is subject to law. But what he has not shown is, that the creative energy is altogether excluded; that is, that ordinary is never subject to extraordinary law. He has not been able to explain the

* Thus we commence the history of the earth's crust with the Azoic Rocks. We go on next to those which contain the most primitive forms of life, "a truly primordial group, composed of peculiar algæ, Bryozoa, Brachiopoda and Crustacea, of two orders only! Not one lamelliferous, gasteropodous or cephalopodous mollusk, no fish or reptile" (Phillips's "Geology," p. 121). Then we proceed in the subsequent strata from the lower orders of being to vertebrate animals, fishes, reptiles, mammalia, and man.

various character and origin of vegetable and animal life. He has not been able to explain the process whereby the first vegetable or animal came into being.* But further, he has never been able to produce a single instance of one species passing into another, neither in the historical period nor in the infinite ages before the creation of man. However closely allied the types of being may be; however infinitesimal the difference in their structure, still throughout the whole course of the ages since man's introduction on the earth, they have ever remained distinct. The horse and the ass, the dog and the wolf, the canary and the goldfinch, if they can be brought to produce offspring, can do so for one generation only. The creatures so produced are doomed to sterility. Thus, then, we still, so far as science gives us any assistance, are forced to ascribe the existence of new species to a power external to Nature's ordinary laws; that is to say, to a power of the miraculous, not of the natural order, according to the definition we have given of a miracle.†

* "How came the bodies of animals to be contrived with so much art, and for what ends were their several parts? Was the eye contrived without skill in optics, and the ear without knowledge of sounds?" (Newton, "Optics," p. 344). Mr. Darwin, it is true, undertakes to answer this question about the eye. But all he succeeds in proving, is that the eyes of the earlier articulata are without a lens, and that "there is an advance towards perfection" in the more highly developed species. He "can see no great difficulty in believing" that "natural selection" can account for this. But to what is the law of natural selection owing? And is the fact that even a distinguished man like Mr. Darwin "can see no difficulty" in a certain theory equivalent to a demonstration of its truth?

† This is admitted by Mr. Grove in his inaugural address to the British Association at Bath in 1866. He argues, it is true, against the theory of "the frequent recurrence of fresh creations out of amorphous matter," and says that "each of them is a miracle." But though he

The existence of man, again, is another fact of which science can give no account.* The most superficial view of his constitution establishes the fact that he is a being of another order than any which had been seen before. The most ingenious comparisons of his physical structure with that of the ape, the most careful collection of the instances in which the lower animals, and the monkey tribe especially, have shown qualities which approach to the exercise of reason, are not sufficient to bridge the gulf which separates man from the lower animals, nor to disprove the assertion—the only one the facts will warrant—that he is a break in the continuity of Nature; that he is a new fact in the order of the visible world.

But we may go still further and assert that the creative process, the manifestation, that is, of a power outside the region of the natural order, is going on continuously from day to day. “Which is more difficult,” asks Pascal,† triumphantly—and we are not aware that any sufficient answer has been given to his question—“to be born, or to be raised again.” The creation of fresh species out of nothing is not a process which we have any reason to believe is going on to any very great extent at the present time, though it has been going on to an indefinite extent in ages long past. But the evolution of a separate being from

argues that “if we were entitled to conclude that the progress of discovery would continue in the same course . . . all lines of demarcation would cease, the polygon would become a circle, the succession of plants a line,” he does not, it may be observed, assert that we *are* entitled to come to this conclusion.

* “To make a man is at least as great a marvel as to raise a man from the dead” (Abp. Trench, “Notes on the Miracles,” Chap. ii.).

† *Pensées* II., 323. In this, however, he does but follow St. Augustine: “*Majora quidem miracula sunt, tot quotidie homines nasci qui non erant, quam paucos resurrexisse qui erant*” (Serm. 242, 1).

another being, a distinct individual, absolutely distinct in will, in character, in power of individual action, is a mystery which no science can explain. That the force of vitality should have power to recreate the organism which its own energy has built up, but in which it for a time has ceased to operate, is antecedently infinitely more credible than that it should have power to throw off from itself a living creature, entirely independent of itself in every way – a being over which it has from the very moment of its separate existence absolutely no power. This last is a fact of so astounding a kind, so utterly inexplicable by the known laws of nature, that were it not for its hourly occurrence, we should declare it to be far more incredible than the most extraordinary miracle ever reported to have happened. Well may Pascal add, “Custom renders the one (birth) easy to understand ; the fact that it is unusual, renders the other (resurrection) impossible. That is the popular way of looking at such questions.”* It is not the mere physical aspect of the process which is so surprising. That a physical organism should have the power of producing other physical organisms in every respect like itself would be a matter of comparatively little surprise. That a human body should have under certain circumstances the power of evolving other human bodies, would not perhaps astonish us, if that were all. It is the moral, the metaphysical aspect of the matter which is so astounding. The mystery is in the fact that each such newly-produced creature is a living being, with a separate seat of personality, separate mind, will, thoughts, a separate seat of emotions and feelings, and that from the moment of its evolution by the parent being it becomes absolutely independent. From the moment of its separate existence it admits of no in-

* Pascal, Bk. II. 323, ed. Faugère.

fluence but one which is entirely indirect over its actions and resolves. It frequently happens that others who have had nothing whatever to do with its production have infinitely more influence and authority over it in this respect than those who have brought it into existence. Indeed, it is a by no means unfrequent occurrence that the parent has even less power over the spirit of the child than any one else. It was a question much argued in the middle ages,* whether each human soul was a fresh creation of the Almighty, or whether, like the body, the soul was derived by propagation from the parents. Modern science has not advanced a single step towards the solution of this enigma. The fact of the hereditary transmission of certain appetites and instincts, even where the parent has been removed from any personal intercourse with the child, is a fact which looks in one direction. The strange and marked difference from both its parents which a child often displays from the very first moment when natural tempers and dispositions begin to show themselves, is a fact which looks as plainly in the other. We may well, before laying down any canons as to what is possible, and what is impossible in nature, reflect on the insoluble mystery of human existence. That man is governed by laws which are outside what we call the course of nature, we have already seen. That the operation of physical laws is incapable of accounting for the existence of a single human being, is another fact which we must add to our store of evidence for extra-physical, or as we might not inaptly call them, supernatural forces. Not only is the power at work in producing a single individual of the human species, with an

* Among the supporters of Creationism and Traducianism respectively.

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independent mind and will,—or even (we might add) of any creature possessed of life,—entirely outside the sphere of any natural forces with which we are acquainted, but scientific research does not bring us any nearer to the discovery of the mystery. With the *effects* of vital force we are becoming daily more familiar. Their *causes* are as inscrutable as ever. Professor Tyndall may arouse the laughter of a would-be scientific audience by telling them “he would make a baby if he could.” He may further stimulate the pride of his hearers by telling them that he believes the time is coming when the secret of life will be penetrated. But he has not yet succeeded in proving that science has taken one single step in the discovery *how* things are, though she has taken many most indescribably valuable ones in the direction of ascertaining *that* they are. The truth is, that we are encompassed on all sides by mysteries. The existence of a natural order, decreed by Him who is “not the author of confusion, but of peace,” is an ascertained fact. But beyond that nothing is known. We are so much in the dark about the reason of all that is, and about its origin and mode of operation; we find ourselves encompassed on all sides so closely by the inexplicable and inscrutable,* that our wisest attitude were one of reserve on questions such as these. Instead of saying “it cannot be,” true humility, and the true scientific spirit (and the two are inseparable), would lead us to inquire whether it *is*. *Some* light we need on the mysterious questions of

* The very forces, as we have seen (Chap. iv.), by which the present course of nature is guided, entirely elude our scrutiny. “The seed that multiplies in the furrow is as marvellous as the bread that multiplied in Christ’s hands” (Abp. Trench, “Notes on the Miracles,” Chap. ii.). The whole order of Nature, by what laws soever we may observe it to be governed, is as mysterious in its origin as the most extraordinary deviation from it could be.

being, of duty, of responsibility, of present and future existence and happiness and usefulness. A spirit of inquiry, at least, as to whether the Creator has vouchsafed such light from any quarter, can hardly be deemed out of place. Upon such an inquiry we have now embarked. In view of the manifold perplexities of existence it behoves us, on questions like these, to be fair and candid, and not to prejudge the question by laying down propositions which bar inquiry.

We have now concluded the first part of our investigation, the inquiry into the possibility of miracles. We will briefly sum up the results of our investigation. We commenced by an examination whether, as alleged, the uniformity of Nature were fatal to the possibility of the miraculous. We showed, first, that there was no proof that nature was necessarily uniform in her action, even if she had been ordinarily observed to be so. Next we showed that scientific methods demanded a study of the evidence before laying down any theory on the subject. We then proceeded to show that the assumption of uniformity rests upon no logical basis whatever; whereas the opposite theory, that interruptions of that uniformity might happen at the will of a Personal Being, who had called the order of Nature into existence for some higher purpose, was in itself tenable and logical, and deriving some support from facts. We concluded by showing that the alleged uniformity of Nature was *not a fact*; that though certain forces were at work, with certain defined rules of operation, their results were as various and variable as could be conceived.

In the next chapter we advanced a step further. Not only, we contended, was the supposition that the course of Nature was subordinate to some higher order in itself

reasonable and probable, but it was supported by facts. We showed that what was called the "law" of force must not be held to involve any idea of compulsion or necessity, or *invariability*, but simply an observed order of facts; while as to Force itself, it appeared ultimately to be resolvable into the effect of Will, no other rational explanation of its working having been offered. This view of the origin of Force was confirmed by an observation of the effects of the human will upon the course of Nature, whence it was argued that we might rise from the conception of certain defined natural forces, subjected to the control of the will of a being whose faculties were limited, to the conception of a Supreme Will, to whose fiat all natural force must be ascribed. We next endeavoured to investigate the phenomena which connect the material world with these external forces which are seen to be exerted upon it. We endeavoured to show, not only that such forces were exerted, but that they were exerted in such a manner as to countenance the supposition just hazarded, that the exercise of a supreme Will was the origin of all Force. Will, as the source of Force, was seen to be no mere isolated or inexplicable phenomenon, but related to a general principle of subordination of law to law. The subjection of Matter to Mind, of Mind to Will, of Will to an order of being known as Spirit, whose connection with Matter in the case of human beings was undeniable, and of whose connection with Matter under other circumstances there exists some probable evidence, appeared to be a fact capable of establishment. We next proceeded to examine whether Will itself were capable of being reduced to laws. And it appeared in all cases to be the expression of purpose; and that purpose itself was directed by a view of what was necessary for the happiness of man-

kind. And from this point we were led to the ultimate cause of all. The supposition of a Personal God we had seen* to be in no way inconsistent with the facts. The idea now presents itself to us as the only rational explanation of them. The subordination of Matter to Mind, of Mind to Will, of Will to Purpose, which we had gathered from observation—the existence of a moral and spiritual order which seemed derivable from such observation—was evidence of the existence of a Being who is not only the author of the visible universe, but of all being whatsoever, as well as of the laws by which being is regulated. That there is such a Being we did not attempt to demonstrate directly. But we contended that no other hypothesis would explain facts or supply men with an adequate motive for conduct. If there be such a Being—and we have accumulated many reasons to show that His existence is a moral necessity—we can imagine no method more natural of making His will and purpose known, than by a modification or suspension of the positive laws of His lower creation.† Thus, while on the one hand we have shown the existence of forces external to nature, which, as a fact, *do* exercise a power of control over its laws, we have

* Chap. iii.

† So contends St. Thomas Aquinas. Since, he says, the knowledge of God is the end for which rational beings are created, it cannot be in any way surprising if the visible order be altered in order to effect that purpose. It should not be forgotten that the whole subject of miracles and the objections to them was fully thought out eight centuries ago. Abelard, in the beginning of the twelfth century, remarked that philosophers, in their objections to miracles, could not soar above every-day experience into the region of the Divine will and purpose. From the fact that Christianity has stood its ground so long a time against the assaults of philosophers, we may augur that it is destined to survive yet a little longer.

advanced to the conception of a Being in whom this power of control over His works would be the most obvious method conceivable of making His purpose known. Lastly, we have collected instances in which the order of Nature itself shows evident traces of being under the dominion of such a Will, interfering with the ordinary process of natural law, whenever new laws, new means, that is, of carrying out His purposes are required. Hence, therefore, we arrive at the conclusion, that not only are miracles not in themselves intrinsically impossible, but, on the contrary, are under certain supposed circumstances in the highest degree probable. We can, therefore, have no right to reject them without examination, but are bound, on the contrary, to examine very carefully into the evidence on which they are offered for our acceptance.

CHAPTER IX.

*WHY SHOULD A REVELATION BE ESTABLISHED BY
MEANS OF MIRACLES?*

WE have now, after a careful investigation of the conditions of existence in the visible world, come to the conclusion that under certain circumstances miracles are not only possible, but in a very high degree probable. We proceed next, before entering upon the evidence for miracles, to consider what these circumstances are. The theory of Christianity is, that the position and nature of two parties have to be taken into account, the one a Personal God, whose laws have been broken by the creatures He has made, and the other those creatures themselves: and that certain remedial agencies have been set at work by the Supreme Being, whereby the effect of such past transgression shall be counteracted. And be it remarked that the Christian scheme does not content itself, as has often been erroneously supposed, with what is termed "propitiation for sin," but it aims at the restoration of the sinner—of the whole race of sinners—to a position in which obedience to law is once more their normal condition. Of the doctrine of a Personal God we shall say no more than we have already said—that it appears to afford the only clue to the perplexities of existence.* We shall investigate in this

* See above, Ch. vii.

chapter the condition and nature of man, as far as they may be regarded as likely to receive, and capable of receiving, communications from a Higher Power, such as we have conceived to exist. Supposing such communications to be necessary, how are they to be made?

And first, we may ask, *are* such communications necessary? Could not mankind have attained to the truth without them? Of course it is the contention of the opponents of Christianity that mankind has advanced and is advancing, without them, by a natural law of growth and development from the very first. We cannot do more in this short essay than touch on the considerations which lead us to an opposite conclusion, but they appear to us to be ineffaceably stamped on the world's history. Of the fact of sin, of departure from the true ideal of humanity, or by whatever other name it may be desired to call it, there is no controversy between the assailants and defenders of Christianity. Its wide-spread effects in human misery and human wickedness are too clearly visible to be denied. But it is a remarkable fact, that until the communication alleged to have been promised by God from the time when sin was first committed, and to have been made in the Person of Jesus Christ, no progress seems to have been made by mankind in overcoming it. The material progress, no doubt, in the ages before Christ, was considerable. But every one of the great empires of the world, the Egyptian, the Hittite, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Greek, the Roman, was a temporary success and a permanent failure. Conquest brought luxury in its train, and luxury the dissolution of morals, and in each successive case the effects of that dissolution of morals were more disastrous and universal than before. But from the wreck of the Roman empire there gradually arose a society which had in it a salt which preserved it from

corruption. Momentary periods of reaction there may have been, but no one will pretend that the world is more wicked now than it was two thousand years ago. And if it be contended that this is not owing to Christianity, but to civilization (whatever that word may mean) and material progress, how is it, we may ask, that non-Christian nations have failed to share in the application of that law? Mohammedanism is a younger, and for a time at least was apparently a more vigorous religion than Christianity. It spread itself, sword and Koran in hand, with irresistible violence over the East, and in the West it threatened Christianity with destruction. Its empire extended at one time from Vienna in the east, and the Pyrenees in the south of Europe, to the vast peninsula of Hindostan. Its civilization and material progress was renowned throughout the world. Science and art in the earlier portion of the Middle Ages found their home in Arabia,* and Macaulay has told us how Louis the Great and our own Charles II, might be regarded as mere barbarians beside the great Mogul in his splendid magnificence at Delhi,† Where are these magnificent empires now? We see in their place thrones tottering to their fall, civilization gradually sinking into barbarism, and even the most corrupt forms of Christianity possessing more life than Mohammedanism, or any other form of religion in the world. And we may ask once more, whether it is to the Christian or the non-Christian elements in professedly Christian populations that our acknowledged progress is owing.‡

* See Gibbon's "Decline and Fall."

† Macaulay, "Essay on Lord Clive." See also his "History of England," Ch. xviii.

‡ Christianity alone seems to have inward vital force enough to bring about reformation. Other religions are smitten with an inward

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It will hardly be denied that this consideration gives us some ground for believing, not only that a revelation—a communication to us of God's Will—of some kind was wanted, but that *it has been made*. We go on to inquire *how* it could be made? Are there any reasons for supposing that it must have been made by miracles? We speak at present of *à priori* reasons. Of the evidence we shall speak later. Our present purpose is to ascertain whether there be anything in the conditions of the problem how a revelation is to be made which would lead to the supposition that miracles are the most natural way of making it. Such reasons are to be found in the circumstances of the case, and in the constitution of man himself.

I. They are to be found in the circumstances of the case. "Desperate diseases," it is often said, "demand desperate remedies." And with man, as we have seen, the case was indeed desperate. Imagination, reasoning, thought, effort, had been expended in vain. The philosophers of Greece, the mystics of India, the politicians, the lawgivers, had failed in solving the problem. Their well-meant efforts had but aggravated the disease. Even God's own law had but served, as it was intended to serve,* to manifest its inten-

canker which seems to consume their vitality. Christianity is no exception to the law of decay, but it alone possesses vigour enough to throw off the disease. The Reformation itself is an instance of this truth. The revival of religious zeal in the Church of England during the present century is another. If we wish to see how Christianity effects reforms, perhaps no better instance can be given than the effect of Jeremy Collier's "Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the Present Stage" upon the disgraceful state of public morals after the Restoration. Dryden, though intellectually far superior to his antagonist, was paralysed in his reply by the force of conscience.

* "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. iii. 20; see also vii. 7). Our argument in the text applies only to the *Christian* miracles

sity. Society was rotten at the core. Earnest men wasted away with anxiety to penetrate the secret of existence.* And to all human seeming things were likely to become worse instead of better.† Moral evil, which had been growing upon society from the beginning, threatened now to engulf it. In such a state of things was there anything unreasonable in Locke's theory that "the extraordinary nature of the emergency rendered the extraordinary interposition necessary, and therefore credible?"

II. But the reasons for the *interposition* of the miraculous are not only to be found in the circumstances of the case; they are to be found in the whole nature and constitution of man. Were he an entirely spiritual being, we might concede to Professor Baden Powell that a purely spiritual revelation, apart altogether from the visible universe, would be best adapted to his needs.‡ But he is *not* an entirely spiritual being. And not only so, but it is important to remark that, from a Christian point of view, he never will

But it is extended to the Old Testament miracles by the consideration that, previous to the revelation of God in Christ, it was a matter of urgency (1) that the extent of man's corruption should be known, and (2) that the existence of the One True God should not be lost sight of.

* "Clementine Recognitions," Book I., Ch. i., 2; "Homilies," Book I., Ch. i., 2.

† So Juvenal's Satires imply throughout. Horace also (*Odes*, iii., 6, 20) complains of the degeneracy of the times. And so persuaded is Virgil of it, that he regards it as an invariable law of Nature (*Georgics* ii., 200).

‡ Professor Baden Powell supposes that the spiritual and physical worlds are so distinct, that they must needs be eternally apart, and that therefore the one "cannot come into contact or collision" with the other ("Order of Nature," p. 276). The existence of man, it must be confessed, constitutes some slight difficulty in the way of this hypothesis. In him the spiritual is in close contact with the material, and, may we not add, often in collision with it,

be. The redemption of the body forms an integral part of the Christian scheme.* The resurrection of the body, under such circumstances as shall make it a fitter instrument for the purposes of the spirit, is another equally integral portion of that scheme.† Any revelation, or scheme of renewal which does not come in any way into contact with this lower part of man's nature, must of necessity be incomplete. And besides all this, it would in all probability fail of its object. The finer the mechanism, the more easily it is put out of order. And the more delicate the perceptions of man, the more exquisite the perfections of any portion of his being, the more irreparable the injury if they should in any way be deranged. The havoc wrought by disobedience would therefore be greatest in the higher parts of his being. That his moral sense would be terribly blunted by indulgence in evil, we need no very great amount of argument to prove. But it is perhaps not so clearly perceived that it would be in his spiritual nature that the greatest mischief would be done. Those perceptive faculties which should discern the things of God just as the eye does the things of external nature, would be utterly darkened, and for the time destroyed. Nor is it easy to see how a revelation which appealed to these faculties alone, in the enfeebled condition in which they were left by the fall, could possibly have met with any response.‡ But it has been asked, would not the introduction of a per-

* Rom. viii. 23. † 1 Cor. xv. ; 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 4.

‡ Let us suppose, *e.g.*, that the idea was imparted to the mind of a particular person that *an atonement had been made for the sins of the world*, and that the Divine power stopped with the act of imparting that idea, and went no further. The idea, then, of a certain mysterious event having taken place has been imparted to him, and he has it, but so far from that person being able to give proof of that event to others, he would not even have received evidence of it himself. Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 12.

fectly sinless character into the world have been sufficient to compel the adhesion of mankind to His doctrine, without any disturbance of the laws so wisely laid down for the government of the physical universe? We might reply, *à priori*, no, for man has not the necessary faculties wherewith to discern perfect goodness, even if presented to him. His moral nature is too disordered to perceive it if he saw it. And if we did so reply *à priori*, we might support our assertion by facts. History presents us with innumerable instances of the truth. Moral goodness has rather drawn upon itself man's hatred than his love. We all know the story of the ostracism of Aristides, and of the citizen who voted for it because he was tired of hearing Aristides called the just. And it has been the fate of all reformers to be misunderstood in the age in which they lived. Socrates sentenced to death by the Athenian judges; Rienzi abandoned by those for whom he had spent his life; Savonarola burnt for opposing the powers that be; Luther answering for his heresies at the Diet of Worms; scientific discoverers in advance of their age, condemned as sorcerers, or derided as lunatics, are but instances of a law co-extensive with humanity. But the most conspicuous instance of it is the fate of the Saviour Himself. He has been admitted, even by those who do not believe in Him, to have been the purest and loftiest character the world has ever seen, teaching a morality in which it is impossible to find a flaw.* And yet He was put to death. So much for the theory that a perfectly sinless character would avail of itself to do the work humanity requires to be done for it.

* So much is admitted by John Stuart Mill, who, in the very last work he ever wrote, places Jesus Christ in the very first rank of men of genius, and as "the greatest moral reformer and martyr to that mission who ever existed on earth" (Mill, "Three Essays," pp. 253-5).

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One alternative must be conceded as possible. If redemption is carried on by the communication to man of a spark of the divine life of the new humanity, such a communication might have been made to his spiritual nature alone. It might have followed the laws of growth which are characteristic of everything we see around us. The spiritual faculties of man might first have been restored, and the re-creative process might have flowed onward to the other parts of his being. There can be no doubt that it *might* have been so. But at least that it *must* have been so is a position that may be contested. It resolves itself, once more, into a balance of probabilities. Is it more in accordance with God's dealings that things should advance from the lower to the higher, or from the higher to the lower. The analogy of Nature is in favour of the former. The development of species has clearly taken this course. It has also, on a wide view of the phenomena, been the case in the history of man. It was so from the first with his intellectual development. The history of the last two thousand years has established the fact that his moral development follows the same law. But we are not left to *à priori* reasonings on this point. We have before us the history of the Christian scheme. Putting miracles for the present out of the question, we see that Christ Himself did not first communicate the life to His disciples which He came to reveal. He appeared among mankind, a Man amongst men; He appealed to their reason, their feelings, their better instincts, and so He prepared them for the reception of the spiritual gift He had in store. It was the same with the written narratives of His life. First came the simple account of His outer life among men, and of His moral teaching. Then, after a considerable interval, came the account of the deeper truths of His Revelation. This

argument will, of course, have no weight with those who absolutely reject the Christian scheme. But there are many who, while they are not prepared to abandon Christianity entirely, are nevertheless inclined to doubt whether the miracles alleged to have been connected with it could really have happened. To such it may not be useless to point out that miracles, as an appeal to man's reason through his senses, fall in with the whole system of Christianity, and we might add, with those dispensations of God's providence which paved the way for Christianity.*

We have therefore good reason for believing that if a revelation addressed to man is to gain a hearing, it must be addressed to him as a whole. Appeal must be made to his lower as well as his higher faculties, to his senses as well as his spirit. The spectacle of God authenticating the teaching of those sent from Him by the visible evidence of power exercised over Nature, becomes from this point of view a necessity. It is the only argument man is capable of comprehending. With a moral sense disordered, and spiritual faculties benumbed, he is incapable of responding to appeals to the higher part of his nature, unless they be reinforced by appeals to the lower. Not that the latter would be of any use without the former. We shall see in a later chapter that miracles alone would constitute no evidence of the Divine, though of course they would of the supernatural, origin of a system of doctrine. But miracles are just what are wanted to drive home the argument which other evidences offer. Man is attracted by a doctrine which satisfies his intellect, his conscience, and his heart. It seems all that can be desired, but how is he to know that it comes from God? His higher faculties are not sufficiently aroused to be able to decide the question. It is here that miracles

* See also below, p. 119.

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step in, and authenticate the teaching with the stamp of Divine authority. "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him," was the exclamation of the "teacher in Israel."* Christ was "manifested to be the Son of God with power," † not only by the Resurrection from the dead, but in a thousand other ways. His miracles "manifested forth His glory." ‡ He was "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power, for God was with Him," § and displayed His presence by the mighty works that were done. This is an argument man is capable of appreciating. The argument drawn from the manifestation of power over creation is one clear to the meanest intellect. That He who made the world can mould its operations as He wills, may be contested by the dialectician, or by him who desires to escape from the consequences fixed on him by a belief in revelation, but by the mass of mankind it will be accepted as a self-evident truth. And when a teacher professing to come from God is seen to be capable of setting aside at his will the ordinary operations of nature, mankind in general will at once conclude that his teaching is at least worthy of attention. This is the reason why certain characters in Scripture story, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus Christ and His Apostles, are encircled with a halo of miracles. We shall show in a subsequent chapter || that so far from the cessation of miracles being an argument against Christianity, it falls in alike with scientific and revealed teaching, that miracles should be an exceptional occurrence. Only when God desired to make His will known to man at particular crises of his history are they reported as occurring. At other times man, as we should have expected beforehand, is left to himself.

* St. John iii. 2.

† Rom. i. 4.

‡ St. John ii. 11.

§ Acts x. 38.

|| Chap. xiv.

Why should Miracles Happen? I ↓ I

So far we have argued upon the ground that Christianity is a system of doctrine. But it must be remembered that Christianity is far more than this. Christianity, as Bishop Butler has shown, is intended as a system of training, and it aims at developing precisely the same kind of qualities in the man which would conduce as a rule to virtue and happiness in the present life. An historical revelation, therefore, based on the one side on evidence, though of course on the other on qualities in the human mind to which that evidence is peculiarly fitted to appeal, is just the kind of revelation likely to discipline the mind to that seriousness, earnestness, humility, teachableness, self-restraint, industry, perseverance, which are necessary elements of all true goodness.

Thus the evidence of Christianity will naturally be of a kind to develop these qualities, as also those of awe and reverence, which are connected with the best part of man's nature. A revelation made by miracles, is likely to produce such results. For it appeals at once to reason, and to what is above reason. It demands care and examination into the credentials of a revelation, and at the same time, it forces man to confess dependence on a power beyond himself. The implanting of an inward conviction of the truth of any system, which is often suggested as the means whereby God might have revealed Himself, constitutes no means whatever of moral training, but makes man a mere passive recipient. But the occurrence or reported occurrence of miracles compels our attention, and sets us upon inquiring from what source such marvels proceed. When joined to the moral and spiritual force of what is thus revealed, it convinces the inquirer that this strange interposition of an external power into the world could only have been for his good, and that a doctrine so supported, and so

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intrinsically ennobling in itself, must surely have come from God.

III. Nor is this all. Christianity is not merely a system of doctrine, or of moral training. It is a system which aims at man's restoration to the image of God, from which he had fallen. And whether true or false, it depends upon the assumption that this restoration could only be effected by God's becoming man. Nor are we to suppose that the theory is necessarily to be embraced, which assumes that the reason of His so becoming man, was because an infinite price was due to God for the enormity of man's sin, which an Infinite Being alone could pay. The whole Christian scheme has been seriously obscured by theories of this kind, theories to which, it may be observed, Scripture never commits itself. Into the question of the nature of the sacrifice for sin we shall not enter in these pages. It is sufficient that we recognize the truth, that Scripture speaks of such a sacrifice as necessary, and of Christ, as having made it by His Death. But, in whatever way the propitiatory virtue of Christ's Death may be explained, it was not the only object of Christ's coming, to make satisfaction for sin. Propitiation was a part, and a necessary part, of Christ's work. But the main object of that work was not propitiation but restoration. That before man could be restored to the position he had lost, the reconciliation must be made, "the handwriting" of his sins, "which was against him," must be "taken away," there can be no doubt. But it was so taken away, in order that all impediment to his restoration should be removed. And his restoration consisted in this, that in Jesus Christ, God and man were once more united; that in the life of Jesus, the purpose of God was for the first time fulfilled, and man reached the ideal of his Creator; that by

His resurrection the conditions of the conflict between humanity and sin were reversed, and the possibility of man shaking off the yoke of corruption, not only demonstrated but achieved; and that by means of the Spirit of God, this perfect nature of Christ was inwrought in the hearts of those who were united to Him by faith, so that in and through Jesus Christ man obtained that freedom from sin, which the experience of ages had proved he could not obtain for himself.

We are to observe that the question is now, not whether a revelation could be made to man except by miracles; not whether a teacher in general requires a Divine authentication of his doctrine, or whether it might not better be allowed to make its way among men by its own intrinsic force, but whether this extraordinary and utterly astounding conception could have been recommended to us in any other way, than by the manifestation of the Divine Power that dwelt in Him, Who so came to save a lost world? The root idea of Christianity is the restoration of man's nature by One Who is Himself God and Man. Could it be possible that God could have thus assumed the veil of humanity without some flashes of His Majesty breaking out from behind it? Or, supposing that He willed to prevent such a betrayal of His Divinity, would it then have been possible for man to have recognized it? Could we blame man for failing to discern it, in the confessedly disordered state of his moral and spiritual faculties? St. John says, "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is for those who reject miracles, to tell us how the Divine Son of God was otherwise to have made Himself and His mission known, than by the manifestation of power as well as goodness,

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Could He do so by coming down and living as a man among men, with no evidences of divine indwelling and divine power, trusting simply to the force of His teaching and the influence of His life to convince men that He was all He claimed to be? Let the late Professor Mozley answer the question. "If," he says, "a person of evident integrity and loftiness of character rose into notice in a particular century and community eighteen centuries ago, who made these communications about himself—that he had existed before his natural birth, from all eternity, and before the world was, in a state of glory with God; that he was the only-begotten Son of God; that the world itself had been made by him; that he had, however, come down from heaven and assumed the form and nature of man for a particular purpose, viz., to be the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world; that he thus stood in a mysterious and supernatural relation to the whole of mankind; that through him alone mankind had access to God; that he was the head of an invisible kingdom, into which he should gather all the generations of righteous men who had lived in the world; that on his departure hence he should return to heaven to prepare mansions there for them; and lastly, that he should descend again at the end of the world to judge the whole human race, on which occasion *all* that were in the graves should hear his voice, and come forth, they that had done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that had done evil unto the resurrection of damnation,—if when this person made these assertions about himself, all that was done was to make the assertion, what would be the inevitable conclusion of sober reason respecting that person? The necessary conclusion of sober reason respecting that person would be that he was disordered in his understanding." There can be little doubt that this

would have been, and would still be, the decision of every rational person in the world about Jesus Christ, if He had no further evidence for His assertions than His life and the wisdom by which He spake. Crazy fanatics have often imposed upon the unthinking portion of mankind by the most random and ridiculous assertions. But their influence has never extended to the intelligent and inquiring. Their career has been a nine days' wonder, and has ended in ruin and disgrace. How comes it that the history of Jesus Christ has been so different? Ruin and disgrace fell, it is true, upon Him, as far as His earthly career was concerned. He suffered the death of a malefactor. But how was it that this was not an end to His pretensions, as it has been in the case of everyone else who has made similar, or in fact any absurd or irrational, claims? Is not the inference irresistible that it was because His claims did *not* rest simply on His own assertion, but were supported by palpable proofs of a Divine Presence, both with Him and those who proclaimed Him? Had He simply come to teach, His teaching might have been permitted to win its way by its own intrinsic excellence. But He came not merely to teach, but to redeem; and He redeemed by proclaiming Himself as the Son of God, by belief in Whom alone men could obtain remission of sins, by union with Whom alone they could obtain everlasting life. Thus the very nature of His doctrine, the very fact of His mission, imperatively demanded the manifestation of miraculous powers, if that mission were not destined from the first to be an utter failure. The belief in His Divine personality, and still more the continuance of that belief in augmented force after eighteen centuries, would be more "contrary to experience," more contrary to the laws which usually govern human nature, more miraculous, in fact, supposing

it to have rested simply on His own statement, than any miracle which has been recorded.

Thus, then, to sum up what has been said, we see that the nature of him to whom the revelation had to be made, as well as the nature of the revelation itself, both point to miracles as the only means by which it could be effected. Man possesses a twofold nature. He is at once a creature of the visible and of the invisible world. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that if a revelation were made to him, it would appeal to the various elements of his nature. It is, moreover, clear that the effect of sin upon his constitution has been more marked in the higher than in the lower portions of his being. Therefore it is probable that a revelation which included an appeal to those lower faculties, to his physical perceptions, his reason and his affections, would be more likely to meet with a response than one which addressed itself to his spiritual faculties alone. These considerations are strengthened by the nature of the revelation itself. Christianity is no mere system of doctrines, but a process of restoration. Its *modus operandi* is the creation of man afresh, by breathing into him the Divine life; the satisfaction of the Divine Justice by a perfect obedience, and a perfect hatred of sin; the absolute renunciation and condemnation of sin in man, by a voluntary submission to the law of death which sin involves,* and the communication to each man of the nature of Him who has achieved this vast work. The carrying out of this plan involves faith in a Person. But how was He to be recognized, when He came, for what He professed Himself to be? Man was not possessed of the faculties wherewith to discern Him. By the very laws of human nature itself, such a Being exposed Himself as a matter of course to a

* Rom. vi. 23; viii. 3.

contumelious rejection at the hands of those whom He came to deliver, unless provided with some credentials of His mission. In no way could He so naturally prove Himself to man to be what He asserted, as by showing the power He possessed over the universe that He had framed.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT EVIDENCE, SPECIAL AND PECULIAR TO THEMSELVES, DO THE SCRIPTURE MIRACLES POSSESS?

BEFORE entering into the main question of the nature of the testimony on which Scripture miracles rest, it will be well to pause, in order to call attention to their general character. For those who have attacked them have adroitly endeavoured to confound them with the hosts of "lying wonders" which have been greedily accepted by the credulous in all ages, and thus an attempt has been made to raise a prejudice against them, which a more candid inquiry will set aside as unfair. The evidence for the various kinds of miracles we shall discuss below. In the present chapter we shall confine ourselves to the essential differences between the miracles recorded in the Scriptures and those recorded elsewhere.

I. The first point that we shall notice, therefore, in reference to the character of the Scripture miracles, is that, unlike the alleged ancient and some of the mediæval miracles, which seem to have had no intelligible object, they were invariably wrought in fulfilment of a Divine purpose.

The miracles recorded in the historical books of the Old Testament were always worked for a purpose. The crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan, the swallowing up of Korah, the falling of the manna, the issuing of water from

the rock, the destruction of the walls of Jericho, were all intended to authenticate and to further the mission entrusted by Jehovah to Moses and Joshua. That is to say, they were connected, and inseparably connected, with events destined to have the most momentous influence upon the history of the world. They are as widely as possible removed, not only in their evidence, but in their nature, from the wonders of early Greek or Roman mythology. They differ essentially from the stories of Theseus or Heracles, of Romulus and Remus, or Quintus Curtius, containing, as these last do, wonders with no adequate cause, and worked for no adequate purpose. The same generic difference may be predicated of the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. They were wrought at a time when faith in the Mosaic Covenant was on the decline. If they were not worked to reconvert the disobedient ten tribes, nor even to arrest the downward course of the kingdom of Israel, these miracles at least had the effect which St. Paul ascribes to the law.* They at least robbed the Israelites of all shadow of excuse for their rebellion, and were intended to be a perpetual Divine witness against it. The miracle of Balaam's ass, though it stands entirely by itself in the Scripture narrative, and may be separated from it without doing violence to what surrounds it, is no mere idle tale of a prodigy. None can fail to miss the deep moral lesson conveyed in the words, "the dumb ass speaking with man's voice rebuked the madness of the prophet." No words could point out more clearly than this history the truth that brute beasts have a finer spiritual perception than the man who abuses his gifts, however great, for selfish ends.

Turn we to the miracles of the New Testament. With two exceptions—and those exceptions intended to prove

* Rom. vii. 7.

that the realm of nature, and even the demons themselves, are subject to God*—they are all works of mercy. Their purpose was to authenticate, not only the mission of Christ, but the spirit of beneficence to man which had decreed it, and the purpose God had in view in it. Christ fed the hungry, healed the sick, stilled the storm when it endangered His disciples' lives, raised the dead. One or two miracles, such as the directing Peter to find the *stater* in the fish's mouth, † the walking on the water, and perhaps the miraculous draughts of fishes, may seem to bear a nearer relation to the portents related elsewhere. But they are not sufficiently alien in character to justify us in separating them from the rest. If Christ were, as He proclaimed Himself to be, the Son of God appearing in human form, it was as impossible that His Divine power should fail to display itself, as it was necessary for man that it should do so. We find that the miracles Christ wrought are divided by the writers of the New Testament into three kinds—*portents*, or events calculated to excite surprise and awe; ‡ *powers*, that is manifestations of a

* St. Matt. viii. 32.

† The mere finding of the piece of money in the fish's mouth is not a miracle. Such things have frequently been heard of. The miraculous part of the occurrence was in Christ's knowledge of the fact that the piece of money would be in the mouth of the first fish which Peter caught. On the supposition of the truth of Christianity, such knowledge is not only probable, but absolutely required by the supposition.

‡ The economy in manifestations of this kind is a remarkable characteristic of Christ's miracles. We may observe that He steadfastly declined to work any miracles when ordinary means would have sufficed. Nay, He even rejected the suggestion that He should do so with the utmost abhorrence. Thus He manifested His identity with the Creator of heaven and earth, who had devised its laws with infinite wisdom for their own purpose, and refused to interfere with them except the necessities of a higher purpose so required.

Divine power residing in the worker, or, as is sometimes the case, displaying themselves in those who have believed in the worker ; and *signs*, or evidences of the reality of the claims made by the worker.* The great majority of the miracles belonged to the last two classes. But although the miracles mentioned above would belong to the first of these classes, yet as they fall in with the general design of Christ's coming, they are not inconsistent with the rest. Standing by themselves, they might be open to suspicion, but combined as they are with the general history of Christ, they are not inconsistent with the general principle that His miracles took place for a purpose, and that purpose the benefit of mankind.

On the other hand, the prodigies related by Livy, which have been adduced as a reason why we should reject the Scripture miracles, are usually of a monstrous and absurd character, nor is it easy to see why they happened at all. A crop of them appear to have been reported every year. And Livy himself makes the remark that "the more the simple and religiously minded believed them, the more they were reported."† But nothing led to them, and nothing came of them, save that when an unusual number of them were noised abroad, there arose an expectation of alarming events to come. Their number is incredible, but with one exception they are utterly unlike the Scripture miracles. We hear of a cow bringing forth a foal,‡ of a foal born with five feet,§ of a cow speaking|| (a very common prodigy), of an infant shouting *Io Triumphe* in its

* See Trench on the Miracles, pp. 2-6.

† Livy, Hist. 24, 10.

‡ *Ib.* 23, 31.

§ *Ib.* 30, 2, 31, 12.

|| *Ib.* 3, 10 ; 24, 10 ; 27 ; 11 ; 28, 11, etc.

mother's womb,* of a woman of Spoleto becoming a man, and the like.† With the single exception of the occasion on which Balaam's ass is said to have spoken, there is nothing like this in Holy Scripture.

The same may be said of the miracles of the Apocryphal Gospels. Nothing could more clearly illustrate the difference between true and false miracles, between those which are worked by the Will of God, and those which are invented by the imagination of man, than these. Nowhere is this better put than in the Archbishop of Dublin's work on the miracles. "So far," he says, "from having a *religious*," these miracles of the Apocryphal Gospels "are often wanting in a *moral* element. The Lord Jesus appears in them as a wayward, capricious, passionate child . . . so bearing himself that the request which the parents of some other children are represented as making, that he may be kept within the house, for he brings harm and mischief wherever he comes, is perfectly justified by the facts. It may be well to cite a few examples in proof, however harshly some of them may jar on the Christian ear. Thus some children refuse to play with him, hiding themselves from him; he pursues and turns them into kids. Another child by accident runs against him and throws him down, whereupon he, being exasperated, exclaims, 'As thou hast made me to fall, so shalt thou fall and not rise,' and the same hour the child fell down and expired. He has a dispute with the master who is teaching him letters, concerning the order in which he shall go through the Hebrew alphabet, and his master strikes him, whereupon Jesus curses him, and straightway his arm is withered, and he falls on his face and dies. This goes on till at length Joseph says to Mary, 'Henceforward let

* Livy, Hist. 24, 10.

† *Ib.*

us keep him within doors, for whosoever sets himself against him perishes.' His passionate readiness to avenge himself shows itself at the very earliest age. At five years old he has made a pool of water, and is moulding sparrows from the clay. Another child, the son of a scribe, displeased that he should do this on the Sabbath, opens the sluices of his pool and lets out the water. On this Jesus is indignant, gives him many injurious names, and causes him to wither and wholly dry up with his curse."

Such is the kind of miracles which human nature invents when left to itself. They embody human passion, not Divine beneficence. And when they do not represent the revengeful spirit of man, they are the mirror of his folly and littleness. The Archbishop goes on to mention miracles of a different class, tricks like the tricks of a conjurer, not solemn acts of power and love. Jesus enters the shop of a dyer, who has received various cloths from various persons, to be dyed of various colours. In the absence of the master, he throws them all into the dyeing vat together, and when the dyer returns and remonstrates, he draws them out of the vat, each dyed according to the colour which was enjoined. He and some other children make birds and animals of clay; while each is boasting the superiority of his work, Jesus says, "I will cause those which I have made to go;"—which they do, the animals leaping and the birds flying, and at his bidding returning and eating and drinking from his hand. While yet an infant at his mother's breast, he bids a palm tree to stoop that she may pluck the fruits; it obeys, and only returns to its position at his command. Another time his mother sends him to the well for water; the pitcher breaks, and he brings the water in his cloak. And as the miracles which he does, so those which are done in regard of him, are idle and monstrous;—the ox and

the ass worshipping him, a new born infant in the crib, may serve for an example.*

The mediæval miracles, again, have been used as an argument against the credibility of those related in Scripture. But these may be divided into two classes; those of the same character as Christ's miracles, and those of a different character. Those of the first character, it is necessary to observe, do not come before us weighted with the same amount of antecedent improbability as the latter. It is quite possible that some of them may be true. It has been frequently supposed † that the defender of miracles must either accept or reject all mediæval or modern miracles *en bloc*; that he is forced to put into the same category the wonders wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, and those attributed to the Curé d' Ars, on the one hand, and on the other, the stories of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, ‡ or of St. Denis, § or of St. Francis of Assisi receiving the *stigmata*. || Such is by no means the case.

* Trench, "Notes on the Miracles," ch. iv., 2. These instances are chiefly taken from the Gospel of the Infancy, an eastern compilation of somewhat late date. But nearly all these stories are found in earlier documents, such as the false Gospel of St. Matthew.

† See the passage from Froude cited below, p. 214.

‡ The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus are said to have retired to a cave to avoid persecution, and to have slept there for a century. The story is evidently only an attempt to put in a vivid form the progress of Christianity during that period, and it came to be believed among the crop of legends which later ages invented.

§ St. Denis is said to have taken up his head after he had been beheaded, and to have walked with it to the place where he wished to be buried, the site of the Abbey of St. Denis, near Paris.

|| This is a favourite subject with Roman Catholic devotional painters. St. Francis was supposed to have been raised above the earth in a trance, and while thus elevated above the earth to have had imprinted upon him the five wounds of our Lord. Many of these

The latter class of wonders make a heavier demand upon our faith than the former. They are wonders wrought without any purpose; suspensions or counteractions of law which involve no principle. They are, therefore, justly liable to the objection which was shown above* not to be conclusive in the case of the Christian miracles. That the Creator of the world, for a sufficient purpose, might see fit to suspend laws which must be regarded as the enactment of the highest wisdom, is conceivable. That He should do so without any such purpose is far less credible. Therefore when Hume alleges that Vespasian performed a miracle of healing, or that Cardinal de Retz saw a man on whom a miracle of healing was wrought,† or when any facts are related in support of any other system than that of Christianity, it may be that we are not to reject them without examination. But on the other hand, we are entitled to require, before accepting them, precisely the same amount of evidence as the defenders of the Christian miracles can produce, and neither more nor less. That is to say, they must have the *à priori* probability that the occasion presented a sufficient cause for the modification or suspension of God's ordinary laws, as well as the distinct and definite evidence which the Scripture miracles have in their favour.

stigmatics have been heard of since. One, Louise Lateau, is now living in Belgium, and her case attracted some attention some years ago; but it appears to have been a mixture of hysterical enthusiasm and simulation.

* Pp. 82-84.

† This miracle differs from those of our Lord, however, in one very remarkable point. Our Lord's miracles controlled, they did not annul, the laws of nature. No such incident is recorded of our Lord as that which Cardinal de Retz records, namely, that a man with one leg rubbed some oil upon it, and that he found himself immediately possessed of two,

They must not only be able to stand the cross-examination, which, as we shall show, the Christian witnesses can undergo without having their testimony shaken, but they must have the same sort of corroborative evidence of a Divine commission on the part of the workers, that the Mosaic and Christian miracles can show. In the case of miracles of another order altogether, portents without any visible or sufficient object, if we do not absolutely reject them, we are bound at least to lay down the canon that the more they do violence to our ordinary experience, the greater weight of evidence they require to substantiate them. *

* Of such a character are the wonders affected to be worked by other founders of religions or sects. The case of Alexander of Abonoteichos has been thought by some to have an affinity with that of our Lord. It is certain that the fame of this teacher spread all over the civilized world, and that he was consulted by men of the highest positions in the state. But when we consult Lucian's narrative, we find that he was a mere vulgar impostor, like Simon Magus before him (as stated by Irenæus, Hippolytus, and in the Clementine Recognitions and Homilies), whose so-called miracles were mere juggling tricks, scarcely capable, in an age like the present, of arousing the attention even of the most ignorant. Lucian's account is said by Neander ("History of the Church," chap. i.) to have been written in Lucian's "usual satirical manner." This is hardly fair to Lucian, who seems to have felt warmly on the subject of the imposture, and to have taken pains to expose it, on account of the insults cast by the pretended prophet on Lucian's favourite teacher Epicurus. Lucian accuses Alexander of having produced a viper out of a goose's egg, after having carefully prepared the trick beforehand. He exposes the obscurity and absurdity of Alexander's pretended prophecies, and records the absurd answers he himself received to questions given to the prophet in a sealed envelope, the contents of which Alexander pretended to be able to read without opening it. Lucian further tells us that this impostor sent out his emissaries, who *said* that he discovered fugitives, converted thieves, found out hid treasures, and even raised the dead. But they gave no proofs whatever that he did any of these things.

The great mass of the mediæval miracles are of this description. A vast number of these have been collected by the poet Southey in his "*Vindiciæ Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ.*" The visions of Fursæus and Drithelm, the apparitions of the Virgin and the Saints to St. Dominic, the effect of the rosary when used by St. Dominic, and many other wonders will be found in his pages. Nor do these wonders appear to have ceased in the present day. We are all aware of the apparitions of the Virgin at Lourdes and La Salette. Later still, she is said to have been seen in a wonderful blaze of light at the wall of the chapel at Knock, in Ireland.

Another point against the mediæval and modern miracles is their frequency. "*Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus,*" is Horace's art canon. And it is a sound one. The laws of this universe would hardly be wise ones, were they perpetually laid aside on the slightest of pretexts. It were a derogation from the Majesty of God to suppose Him capable of so doing. Therefore, as we have seen, the sacred Scriptures represent these miracles as having happened on rare and extraordinary occasions only. In the case of miracles of the Romish Church, it would seem as though no occasion were too trivial to preclude them. It would be difficult to explain on what grounds the apparitions of which we have spoken could have occurred, unless it were to maintain the credit of a holy cause. But, if that be admitted to be a sufficient reason in these instances, it can hardly be pleaded in many others. When St. Martin crossed the Mediterranean on a cloak, or St. Scholastica raised a storm in order that she might have the pleasure of her brother's company for a few hours longer, it can hardly be said that the occasion was worthy of the miracle. But when we are gravely told that water, blessed in the name of St. Ignatius, has power to bring obstinate sinners to con-

fession, or to induce naughty children to eat their breakfast ; when we hear that medals blessed in the name of St. Benedict will make furnaces draw in brick-kilns, or, when steeped in the wine of the drunkard, will make his wine intolerable to him, we must see that the faith which believes in the miracles of Scripture, and that which gives ready assent to such marvels as these, are two very different things.*

II. Our next proof is, that there is a vast difference between miracles alleged to be wrought on behalf of a system already established, and on behalf of one on its trial. We may go a step further. We may affirm, that there is a great difference also between accounts of miracles wrought to tighten the grasp of a priesthood upon an obedient people, and those of Moses and Elijah, intended to conquer and convince the rebellious. For in the former case, all is in favour of the supposed workers. Their miracles obtain ready credence. Investigation and criticism are either impossible, or are never attempted. There is the strongest inducement to pious fraud. And, as a matter of fact, wherever a great mass of miracles of this kind are recorded, indubitable instances of pious fraud are to be discovered among them. No more powerful weapon was placed in the hand of the Reformers than that provided by such discoveries as the rood of Boxley,† the blood of Hales,‡ and the taper of our Lady at Cardigan.§ And

* For these modern wonders I am indebted to Professor Reusch's "Die Deutschen Bischöfe und der Aberglaube." His instances are taken from books published by authority between 1844 and 1872.

† Blunt, "Sketch of the Reformation in England," p. 137.

‡ See Froude, "History of England," iii., 286. Thomas, in his "Pilgrim," written in the reign of Edward VI., gives a very circumstantial account of this imposture.

§ Froude, "History of England," iii., 287.

when to this is added the fact that money ever flowed most freely into the coffers of the shrine where most miracles were worked, it must be confessed that miracles of this kind have a strong antecedent presumption to surmount before they can be accepted. This antecedent presumption is increased when we find that credulity, under the name of faith, is magnified into the highest of virtues, and honest inquiry, under the name of heresy or blasphemy, is regarded as the most heinous of crimes. Before the Reformation it was dangerous to examine into the evidence of a miracle, fatal to disbelieve it.* Under these circumstances the soil is carefully prepared for the manufacture of spurious miracles. It is not to be wondered at if they spring up like mushrooms, nor is the candid inquirer bound even to examine into the evidence for miracles alleged to have been produced under conditions which make a satisfactory inquiry impossible. The Scripture miracles throughout are wrought under conditions precisely the opposite.

The attempts which were at one time made to attribute the miracles either of the Old Testament or the New to imposture have utterly and absolutely failed. No respectable writer in these days, however sceptical, would venture to repeat the coarse language current in the last century on these points. No person of reputation would think of repeating the words, for instance, of Woolston, that the raising of Lazarus was "the most notorious cheat that was

* Archbishop Sudbury's case is a very singular illustration of mediæval feeling. He cast discredit on the value of the pilgrimages made to Becket's tomb. A Kentish knight threatened him with "an ill death" in consequence—a prophecy which was supposed to be fulfilled when he was killed in Wat Tyler's insurrection. Inferior men, if they wished to save their lives, found they had to be ready with a recantation of such sentiments.

ever put upon mankind." * Such language is now confined to the *National Reformer*, and publications of that stamp. Argument and investigation have banished them from the armoury of scholars and men of information, however much opposed to revealed religion they may be. And the reason is evident. The miracles may, or may not, have occurred. We may dispute the sufficiency of the evidence for them if we please. But one thing is plain. If done, they were "not done in a corner." They were worked openly before the world. They invited, nay, they challenged, investigation. The ground was not artificially prepared for their production. All but those prepared to believe them were not carefully excluded from their neighbourhood. Unbelief was not silenced by the strong hand of power. In the case of the Christian miracles at least, as well as in some of the Jewish ones, it was belief that was so silenced, or rather that would have been so silenced, were it possible to suppress so strong a voice of testimony as that of the witnesses to their occurrence. Thus the miracles of Moses were wrought in the face of the Egyptian people and their sovereign, and the question we shall have to discuss in the chapter on the direct evidence for miracles is, whether the Exodus from Egypt could be satisfactorily accounted for without them. His miracles in the wilderness, again, were wrought among a disobedient and gainsaying people, and most of them were rendered necessary by their continual rebellion against his authority. The miracles in the Book of Joshua, once more, were worked to inspire a faint-hearted people with courage. The effect of the reverse at Ai upon the Israelites was enough to discourage

* Many more instances of such language concerning our Lord and His Apostles may be found, by those who care to look for them, in the writings of the Deists of the last century.

the stoutest commander, had he not been sustained by the conviction of supernatural support. But they altogether vanish from the narrative when the position of the invaders was assured by the decisive battle of Beth-horon. We read of no more miracles of importance—not even where we might have been prepared to expect them—in the history of David, until we come to the narrative of Elijah. And here again, whether that narrative be accepted as true or not, it will not be disputed that, if worked at all, they were worked in the face of hostile observers. The whole narrative rests upon the words, “I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” And not only this episode, but the whole history of the kingdom of Israel, and even its existence, must be regarded as fabulous, unless we admit that the genuine worshippers of Jehovah* were a minority of the community. So, again, we may dispute the evidence for the descent, at the prophet’s command, of fire from heaven upon the soldiers commissioned to seize his person. But we cannot dispute the fact, that if Elijah resorted to any weapons at all to defend himself against such overwhelming numbers, they could only have been supernatural ones. The same may be said of the miracles wrought in the time of Isaiah. The description of the state of the country by the prophet himself was most deplorable. The people had utterly revolted from God. So complete was their apostacy that the very worship God had prescribed was an abomination. Oppression and extortion stalked through the land, and tyrants, with an occasional intermission during

* We say genuine, because it has been contended that the calves at Bethel and Dan were set up as symbols, not of any other god, but of Jehovah Himself. But the worship was of a kind expressly forbidden by Him, and therefore impossible to His true followers.

the reign of a pious prince, introduced idolatrous worship, and harassed the worshippers of the true God. And not only so, but such measures were popular. "My people love to have it so," was the complaint of the prophet. With the utmost difficulty a pious prince like Hezekiah was enabled to bring about a superficial reformation. But he could not touch the root of the disease, which lay in the corruption of the people. "The whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint." The prophet himself was put to death, it is generally believed, in the reign of Hezekiah's son and successor, and the incident passed without remark in the general corruption of the times. Under such circumstances as these it was, when the power of Israel was declining, and the promised favour of God was being gradually withdrawn, that a miracle calculated to encourage the true worshippers of God was wrought. Again, we are entitled to contend that, whatever the evidence for or against the miracle, the circumstances under which it was wrought were such as afford no ground for the accusation of fraud or collusion.

Precisely the same remark may be made in reference to the New Testament miracles. We shall show in the next chapter that the Apostles challenged the fullest investigation into the truth of their story, and that they were frequently brought before the legal tribunals, where an exposure of either delusion or imposture might reasonably have been expected. We will here observe, that if delusion or imposture were not exposed, it was not because the will was wanting. The Scribes and Pharisees, and the authorities of the Jewish Church, watched our Lord's career with ever-increasing suspicion ; and, at length, contrived to have Him put to death. As soon as His followers began to spread abroad the tidings of His resurrection, the Jewish

authorities took measures to stop them. They never desisted from their persecution. They were "cut to the heart" at what Stephen said, and in an access of fury they rushed upon him and stoned him to death. By this time the Sadducee had come to take the lead in the persecution.* It soon spread to the court party. Herod seems to have taken some strong measures to put down the new movement,† and the believers were now scattered abroad. But in their flight they only encountered new opposition. Communities of Jews confronted them wherever they went, and endeavoured in every way to prevent the spread of the doctrines they preached.‡ Here, at least, was no deceitful priesthood, endeavouring to rivet its authority upon a credulous and submissive people, by the invention of a host of lying wonders. Here, at least, was no unthinking multitude, swallowing greedily the idle tales, into whose truth it were blasphemy to inquire, while to believe them implicitly was a sure means of prosperity in this world and of happiness in the next. On the contrary, we have the belief spreading in spite of the most desperate efforts on the part of those opposed to it to discredit and to destroy it. We have unscrupulous men resorting to every means to overwhelm the doctrine which they hated, using force where possible, and supplementing it by intrigue and calumny; and yet the cause against which they so vehemently contended continued to prosper, in spite of their utmost efforts. These were hardly the circumstances in which either a hysterical illusion or a deep-laid conspiracy might be expected to gain the ear of the world. The most thoughtless must be forced to admit

* Acts iv. 1. ; v. 17.

† Acts xii. 1, 2.

‡ Acts xiii. 45 ; xiv. 19 ; xvii. 5, etc.

that there is something extraordinary in the success of Christianity under such circumstances as these.

III. Another point which we may touch upon here is the position of the miracles in reference to the history. One of the strongest evidences we shall have to adduce on behalf of miracles in the next chapter is the way in which they are intertwined with the rest of the narrative. The wonders with which it is sought to parallel them are mere isolated events. Not only, as we have contended above, was there no reason to account for their occurrence, but we may detach them from the history without in any way deranging it. With the miracles of Scripture the case is precisely the opposite. We shall show that in almost every case they are so intimately connected with the whole history that it is impossible to separate the two. The history of the Exodus and the history of Jesus Christ (the two great centres of miracle in the Old and New Testament respectively), can only be explained on the assumption of miracles. The endeavour to account for the influence of Moses and of Christ in any other way has involved those who made it in difficulties at least as great as those they have tried to avoid. Even the summary rejection of the whole history compels him who so rejects it to invent a history for himself. He can hardly assert that such persons as Moses and Jesus Christ never existed. And it is when he addresses himself to the task of reconstruction that the enormous difficulty of the task becomes manifest. *Every attempt*, as we shall show, so to reconstruct either history, has been a conspicuous failure, and every new writer who makes it has to begin by discrediting and destroying the work of his predecessors.

IV. Another argument for the authenticity of the miracles is the character of the history itself. All the narratives of the Old and New Testament are simple, clear, and coherent

if the miraculous element be accepted. There is no sign of weakness or folly about them, nor are there any symptoms of inaccuracy or untruthfulness. If they were written by men of childish or credulous disposition, this spirit would surely betray itself in the rest of their history. If the writer were inventing, he would invent a good many other things beside the miracles. If he were habitually inaccurate and unreflecting, we should find traces of inaccuracy throughout. But the transparent simplicity and clearness of the Scripture narratives, their uniform rationality and good sense in all the ordinary portions of the narrative, the extraordinary number of undesigned coincidences, both with one another and with secular history, that have come to light, are sufficient to clear them from any of the charges of weakness, untruthfulness, and inaccuracy. These facts must give their accounts of miracles far greater weight in the eyes of candid men than would otherwise have been the case.

V. One other point must be noticed before we conclude. One of the most plausible objections against miracles is the immense disturbance in the order of the universe which they would necessitate. But, as a matter of fact, very few of the miracles recorded in Scripture involve any such disturbance. Most of them are but modifications of natural processes, and are miraculous, not in their results, but in the manner in which those results are produced. Thus there is nothing miraculous in the fact that the sick should be healed. The miracle is in its being done by a word. The same applies to the case of the stilling of the storm. The miraculous feeding of the four and five thousand, and the turning water into wine, were only contrary to the ordinary course of Nature in the mode of their accomplishment. Neither the walking on the water, nor the entry of the demons into the swine and their consequent destruction,

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involved any large disturbance of natural laws. The finding the *stater* in the fish's mouth involved no disturbance whatever of those laws. It was but an instance of supernatural knowledge. The raising of the dead itself, the only actual setting aside of known laws among the miracles of Christ, though it makes more demands on our faith than the others, is not open to objection on the score of any incompatibility with natural law.* Thus the miracles of Christ, so far from involving the idea of a violent revolution in the regular order of the universe, are remarkable for the absence of any such violence.

The same may be said, as a rule, of the miracles of the Old Testament. The miraculous pathway cloven through the Red Sea and through the Jordan involved no interference with the laws of nature, except at that particular spot. We cannot be sure that natural law was interfered with at all. In the former, we are expressly informed, the miracle was worked by the use of means. The Lord sent a strong east wind, which made the sea dry land.† The opening of the earth, by which Korah was swallowed up, is a circumstance which natural causes have been known to produce. The feeding of the Israelites with manna, the obtaining water from the rock, the supply of quails, required

* "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." The growth from a seed has something of the character of a resurrection. So has the conversion of dead into living matter in the human body mentioned on p. 47, note.

† Exod. xiv. 21. We may find a parallel to this in modern history. If the deliverance of Leyden in 1574 were not a miracle, it was only because it was not worked at the command of man. A special providence it was, of a most extraordinary kind. Mr. Motley's vivid narrative of this divine interposition on behalf of civil and religious liberty, drawn as it is from authentic sources, is well worthy of study. The slow approach of the relieving expedition, on account of the east wind

no contradiction of nature's laws. Even the fire which twice fell from heaven at Elijah's word was only an extraordinary instance of what is a most ordinary phenomenon. In all these cases the miraculous part of the transaction is not the occurrence itself, but the circumstances under which it occurred. The instances in which any large disturbance of the laws of the universe must be supposed to have taken place are reduced, on examination, to two,—the standing still of the sun and moon at Joshua's command,* and the return of the shadow on the dial of Ahaz.† These are the only occasions in which a whole set of forces ordinarily at work would have to be suspended or counteracted in order to prevent a frightful natural convulsion. All the rest are merely examples on a larger scale of the exercise of a similar power to that which, as we have seen,‡ the human will has over the particles and forces of matter. This is a material point in the consideration of the question. Men's imaginations have been frequently inflamed by declamation on the vast interferences with the course of nature which miracles would presuppose, and of the immense improbability that the Deity would sanction such interferences with the universe He had designed with such exquisite skill. It turns out that nearly all of them are capable of being brought about by the ordinary processes of nature. What is miraculous in them is simply the time and manner of their occurrence. The number of miracles which lay their

keeping back the waters of the ocean; the furious storm of October 1st and 2nd, with a "mighty strong" *west* wind, enabling the ships to float to the very walls of Leyden; the drying up of the waters from after October 4th, the very day after the town was relieved, may well be believed to be God's own interposition on behalf of a sorely oppressed people. See Motley, "Rise of the Dutch Republic," Book iv., chap. ii.

* Joshua x. 13.

† 2 Kings xx. 11.

‡ Chap. iv.

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defenders open to these vehement accusations are reduced to two; and of these two, the language of Scripture concerning one is extremely vague;* the other will also be discussed below.

These preliminary considerations we have thought it well to submit to the inquirer before he enters upon the question of the particular evidence on which the Scripture miracles are believed. This particular evidence is often discredited by a persuasion in the mind of the person who examines it, that the unquestionable fact that many false miracles have been firmly believed to have happened justifies a strong suspicion, to say the least, that all miracles are false.† Thus the question is approached in a spirit of prejudice, which is hardly compatible with a candid investigation. We have shown that between the Scripture miracles and the great mass of reported miracles from other quarters there exists a fundamental difference, both in the nature of the miracles themselves, the circumstances under which they were worked, and the nature of the evidence by which they are supported. Therefore, we are entitled at least to say as much as this, that if all other miracles were proved to be false, the Christian miracles stand in so entirely different a position that we should not be entitled to reject them without a careful scrutiny of the direct evidence in their favour.

* See Chap. xi.

† That is just the same as if a magistrate were to say to a person brought before him on suspicion, "Fellow, there are a great many criminals about. Therefore, I have not the least doubt of your guilt, and I sentence you to six months' imprisonment, with hard labour." —"Rector and His Friends."

CHAPTER XI.

*WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR THE SCRIPTURE
MIRACLES?*

WE are now in a position to enter into the evidence for the miracles recorded in Scripture. We have shown that we are not entitled to reject them *à priori* on scientific grounds. We have also shown that we are not entitled to contend that the vast crowd of spurious miracles has in any way prejudiced their case. That case we proceed to put, as fully as our limits allow. And in so doing, we shall first recapitulate some of the conclusions to which we have already arrived. Before entering into the evidence for the particular miracles recorded in Holy Writ, we are entitled to place some of those conclusions among the direct evidence on behalf of the miracles for whose authenticity we are contending.

I. Whatever evidence there is for the existence of a Personal God exercising control over nature, and for His having formed some plan for the restoration of man, is likewise direct evidence in favour of miracles. We have seen * that the only other alternatives conceivable, whereby a revelation could be made, namely, the implanting an irresistible conviction of the truths of that revelation in man's breast, or the imparting the remedial

* Chapter ix.

influence of the Gospel to the spirit of man directly, and not in connection with his senses or his intellect, do not meet the circumstances of the case. Thus, then, the considerations above advanced * are not merely negative arguments against the impossibility of miracles, but very strong positive arguments in favour of their having occurred.

2. The same may be said of the last chapter, in which the distinction between spurious and genuine miracles, between miracles for which we are not, and miracles of which we are, bound to examine into the evidence, is insisted on. Two considerations we have there advanced may be regarded as constituting direct evidence in favour of miracles. The first is, that the Scripture miracles are not only invariably supposed to be connected with the claims of some individual to be a revealer of God's will, but that in every case the subsequent history of the world has shown that these claims were not unfounded. That Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ have brought us revelations of God's will; that is, that to their teaching must be ascribed an advance of a very remarkable kind in the progressive moral education of the world, and even in its theological education, in the proper sense of the word, —will be admitted by many who are not inclined to accept them as infallible teachers. It can hardly be denied, moreover, that the world owes something to the ministrations of men like Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah. Thus, then, we have not only to consider the point that the claim to be teachers sent from God was made, and that the miracles have been alleged in support of it. We have to take into consideration the fact, that there is abundant evidence to show that the claim was justly made. This fact must be allowed to give great additional probability to the allegation

* Chapter vii.

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that miracles were worked,—so great as to be considered as positive evidence in favour of such allegation.

The second consideration is, the force of the evidence that in all these cases they were addressed to “a disobedient and gainsaying people.” That this fact ensured a full investigation of the circumstances under which the alleged miracles were worked, we have already seen in the previous chapter. But the special point to which we would now ask attention is, that in *no other case* have miracles been appealed to as evidence for a religion which was on its trial. “To hear some men talk,” says Paley, “one would suppose the setting up a religion by miracles to be a thing of every day’s experience, whereas, the whole current of history is against it.” No more remarkable instance of the fact can be adduced than that of Mohammed. Here is an exactly parallel case, the setting up of a religion in the face of a strong opposition on the part of men of influence. Does Mohammed pretend to work miracles? No, he knows better than to do so, and his immediate followers know better than to set up any claim that he has done so. He alleges wonderful visions, it is true, because there he is on safe ground—nobody can contradict him. But not only does he not assert that he does work miracles, but he acknowledges that he does not.* His only answer to those who remark on this absence of miracles is, that the Koran is itself a miracle.† Of miracles worked to support a system of religion already existing, as we have seen, we have many. But of miracles worked in support of a

* Koran, Chap. 13, 17.

† “If ye be in doubt concerning that revelation we have sent down unto our servant, produce a chapter like it” (Koran, Chap. 2—Sale’s Translation). Thus Mohammedanism is what Christianity is sometimes inaccurately described to be, a book revelation.

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religion at its first establishment we have *not one*, save in the case of God's revelation of Himself in the Old and New Testaments. If anyone has had the hardihood to pretend to work miracles in the face of hostile witnesses on behalf of his fictitious claims, he has always been detected and exposed. If, like Mohammed or Manes, he is in the main sincere, and his system has made its way by reason of the clement of truth contained in it, he has been careful not to weigh it down by so hazardous an addition as pretensions to the miraculous. Thus, then, if we show, as we hope to show, that the Christian miracles were wrought under circumstances which rendered it the interest of men of ability and position to detect and expose them, we may be sure that if they had been fictitious, whatever the origin of the fiction might have been, their detection and exposure would have followed as a matter of course. The argument from experience has frequently been used in this discussion. We may not unreasonably lay down the canon that it is "contrary to experience" that miracles falsely advanced in support of a pretended mission from on high have any power permanently to delude mankind. And the fact that Christianity has achieved so great, wonderful, and striking a success, by means so certain, had they been imagined or feigned, to have secured its immediate overthrow, amounts to direct evidence that some, at least, of the miracles related in Scripture actually occurred.

We proceed to examine the direct evidence for the miracles of the Old and New Testaments. We shall confine ourselves chiefly to those recorded in the Pentateuch and the Gospels. This we shall do in order not to make our remarks unnecessarily lengthy. If one single miracle be proved to have happened, the necessity of going minutely into the evidence for the rest becomes infinitesimally small. And the evi-

dence required to prove it becomes proportionately less, the greater the number of miracles of which such satisfactory evidence is forthcoming. It is, perhaps, not fair to say that the same amount of evidence is required to support miracles as is required to support the ordinary facts of history. The more extraordinary the fact, the more precise, minute, and strongly supported must be the evidence on which it is believed. And it will be seen that this is exactly the sort of evidence Scripture miracles, as a rule, have to offer. It is an absurd misstatement to say that they have just the evidence which the ordinary facts of history have, and no more. It is an utter falsification to tell us that they come to us on the same authority as the prodigies of Livy, the marvels of monkish historians, or even the miracle worked by Vespasian, or those wrought at the tomb of the Abbé Paris. They come before us with a breadth, a fulness, a cumulative power of testimony to which few historical events can lay claim. They are, as we have seen, so closely intertwined with historical facts, the truth of which cannot be denied, that the denial of the miracles can only be sustained on grounds which would deny the events which have been thus historically demonstrated. They are testified to by documents which have been subjected to a scrutiny applied to no other historical documents in existence, and which have come out of that scrutiny with their veracity on all important points thoroughly established, and their genuineness unshaken. The testimony of those documents, moreover, is contemporary testimony. No amount of literary ingenuity or industry has been sufficient to establish the paradox that the books of Moses were published in the days of Manasseh, or that the Gospels were spurious documents of the second century. And the character of their writers is such, as well as the contents

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of the writings themselves, as to preclude the possibility of collusion or fraud.

I. First, then, let us examine the nature of the general historical evidence for miracles recorded in the Old Testament. And here we may first lay down the famous *four rules* of Leslie, the well-known apologist of the last century.* I. He says that for the proper authentication of a miracle, four conditions are necessary; first, that the facts should be of such a nature that men's senses can clearly and fully judge of them; next, that they should have been performed publicly; third, that public monuments should have been set up, and outward actions performed in memory of the acts thus publicly wrought; and fourth, that these monuments should have been set up, and these actions and observances instituted, at the very time when those events took place, and have continued without interruption afterwards. These four rules, be it observed, are such as can be applied to few historical facts, however widely believed. But all four can be predicated of both the miracles of the Law and of the Gospel. It will not be denied that the miracles which attended the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt were such that they must

* "Short Method with the Deists." His four other marks of credibility, contained in his "Truth of Christianity Demonstrated," are also worthy of notice. They are as follows:—(1) that the book which relates the facts contains *likewise the laws* of the people to whom it belongs, (2) that Christ was previously announced, for that very period, by a long train of prophecies, and (3) still more peculiarly prefigured by types, both of a circumstantial and personal nature, from the earliest ages, and lastly (4), that the facts of Christianity are such as to make it impossible for either their relators or hearers to believe them, if false, without supposing *an universal deception of the senses of mankind*. These treatises deal with the evidences singly. But it is evident that the force of the argument for Christianity chiefly rests upon the combination of these different lines of evidence.

have been patent to men's senses, or that they were performed, if performed at all, in public. But the best evidence that they were so performed is to be found in the fact that public memorials of their performance were established. The Feast of the Passover was established as a memorial of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and the Feast of Tabernacles in commemoration of the long sojourn in the wilderness. Let us observe, moreover, what is the account we have of the institution of these festivals. They have been kept, it is said, from the very time of the entrance of Israel into the Promised Land. Now if, as a matter of fact, such perpetual commemorations had never taken place, the Israelites must have been well aware of the fact; and thus it would have been impossible for the observance of the feasts to have commenced in the way they are recorded in the Jewish Scriptures to have commenced.* That fabulous occurrences should come gra-

* It is admitted that we hear little of the observance of the three festivals during the history of Israel. That they had fallen into abeyance at the time of Josiah is clearly proved by 2 Kings xxii. 8, 11; xxiii. 22, 23; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14; xxxv. 18, 19. Most probably they ceased to be observed very early from the fact (1) that they could not have been kept while Israel was fighting for possession of the Holy Land, (2) that the Israelites early fell into habits of disobedience to the precepts of their law, and (3) that it was very seldom indeed that the circumstances of Israel permitted them to observe the festivals as a nation. The Passover, however, we trace back to the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land (Josh. v. 10). The Feast of Tabernacles was kept with great pomp by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings viii. 2, 65; 2 Chron. v. 3; vii. 8), and we can see by the expressions of the history that the festival was a recognized one. The observance of the Passover seems to have been kept up in the immediate neighbourhood of the tabernacle (Judges xxi. 19, in the original), even in disturbed times. And we may gather in 1 Chron. xxiii. 27-32, that all the service of the sanctuary had been handed down in due order, from the time of Aaron to that of David.

dually to be believed, that public festivals should be connected with a belief in them, are circumstances with which history makes us perfectly familiar. But what we never find, and are never likely to find, is a festival professedly established *at the time* to commemorate an event which never occurred.* We may find accounts of the origin of the chief heathen festivals. But either that origin is lost in remote antiquity,† or it falls under the rule we have just laid down. That is to say, it was established at some period separated by centuries from the event commemorated, an event which, though the evidence was lost, had come to be believed. But the fourth of Leslie's rules requires that there should be a perpetual chain of testimony, from the events themselves to the present day. As regards the survival of these commemorations, there can be no doubt; the Jews keep them still throughout the world. The only question is to what period we can trace

* Some have tried to see in the discovery of the book of the law in the time of Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 8-13) a scheme of the priestly party to palm off a fictitious book as the work of Moses himself. But this is a pure assumption. It takes for granted an amount of ignorance and credulity of which we have no evidence whatever. The writings of the prophets show that unbelief and stubbornness, on the contrary, were the characteristics of the people. They would not believe what their religion told them, or practise it when they admitted it to be enjoined. We have no space here to discuss the account. We must content ourselves with saying that the whole character of the narrative falls in far better with the re-discovery of a book long neglected, but known certainly to have existed, than with the invention of one entirely new, and its acceptance in an age of religious decline.

† Thus the origin of the famous Eleusinian mysteries cannot be satisfactorily explained. The Roman Lupercalia, though the myth of Romulus and Remus has been interwoven in them, yet seem to have had an altogether independent origin, and to have been connected with the recurrence of the seasons.

them back. The genuineness of the Pentateuch has been perseveringly attacked in all quarters. The last effort but one was that of Ewald and his school, who claimed to be able to reduce the Jewish history into its constituent parts, from internal evidence alone, and to be able to show that it assumed its present shape about the time of Manasseh. This effort is a surprising one in itself. The claim to be able to distinguish the sources from which a given historian drew his information, from the style of his narrative, is a somewhat hazardous one, and we should regard the results of such criticism with more confidence had they been first tried, with invariable success, on historians like Gibbon, Macaulay, or Motley. But the attempt has failed. It rested on *à priori* grounds, not on facts. It demanded as a postulate that Deut. xxviii. 68 could not possibly be a prophecy. And it is disproved by the fact that there is a marked and progressive difference in style between the earlier, middle, and later Hebrew. And so it has come to pass that theories advanced with unhesitating confidence by critics like Ewald, must be modified by Knobel, still further modified by Stähelin and Bleek, and nearly abandoned altogether by the former of these two writers in their later editions.* Nothing, therefore, can be more certain than that the attack on the genuineness of the Hebrew Scriptures has

* See Keil and Delitzsch, "Commentary on Joshua," p. 21 (Clarke's Translation). A new school, however, has lately arisen, which has taken altogether fresh ground. Ewald and his followers regard the first four books of the Pentateuch as containing the larger portion of original matter; Deuteronomy as a later fabrication altogether. The new school seeks to persuade us that Deuteronomy contains the older portion of the Pentateuch; Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, the later adaptation. Whatever may be thought of the later theory, which in England, at least, is only just born, it is a significant proof of the utter rout of the earlier school.

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not succeeded. They have undergone a criticism far more searching than any other historical narrative, and they have come out unscathed from the ordeal. Thus one of our conditions for the establishment of the truth of miracles has been fulfilled. It has been conceded that before we accept a miracle we must demand, by reason of the unusual character of the occurrence, fuller evidence than we demand for any ordinary fact. That fuller evidence we find to be forthcoming. We have a chain of testimony, descending from contemporary writers, whose writings are established as genuine by proofs, of far more than ordinary strength, to the events recorded in the Pentateuch. Those events were of a character that could not be mistaken. They occurred in the presence of thousands of people. They have been commemorated by annual memorials even to the present day. And we have the strongest reason for supposing that these memorials were established contemporaneously with the event they were designed to commemorate. This is evidence which must be admitted by every fair-minded man to be of no ordinary kind.

II. A second point to be observed in the facts recorded in the Pentateuch is the institution of a permanent priesthood, one of whose duties, in addition to keeping up the Temple service, with its daily routine of sacrifice, was the instructing the people in the history of the events which had taken place. The Feasts of the Passover and of Tabernacles, it is true, were kept by the people without the necessity of priestly intervention. But the whole Mosaic system of religion depends upon the events commemorated by those festivals. Judaism, whether in its political or religious aspect, cannot be detached from the Exodus and the wandering in the wilderness. If the law were not given at Sinai, it is difficult to understand what evidence can esta-

blish any historical fact whatsoever. If the whole system of Jewish observances did not date from the time to which Scripture assigns them, it is not very easy to see when they came into being. But if the explanation that Moses was an historical personage, and that the institutions attributed to him were, in their main features, his work, is the only one by which the facts can be accounted for, then we have an order of men established from the very date of the Exodus itself, whose business it was to keep the Israelites in mind of the great events by which their freedom was achieved;* we have a tradition handed down from the very first,†—not merely orally but in writing, and not merely in writing, but in an elaborate system of commemorations and commemorators—of events so unheard of in the history of the world before or since. Not only is this a guarantee of the accuracy of this particular history such as few histories are provided with, but the nature of the testimony itself bears witness to the fact, declared with emphasis, moreover, in the record,‡ that the occurrences so recorded were altogether unusual in their character.

III. But we have further evidence for the truth of the miracles. They are found, in almost every case, to be so inextricably involved with the history that they cannot be disentangled from it without great difficulty.§ The fact of the Exodus itself will not, it may be presumed, be denied.

* Lev. x. 11; Deut. xxxi. 9-13.

† Josh. xxiv. 1-13; Psalms lxxviii., cv., cvi.

‡ Deut. iv. 33-36; v. 24, 26; vii. 17, 21.

§ This truth is admitted by Lord Bolingbroke (Works, iii., p. 279. Ed. 1754), and made a reason for rejecting the history. Livy's prodigies, he says (as we have contended), may be detached from the history without interfering with its general course or credibility. In the Jewish history you have no alternative but to reject the history or to admit the miracles.

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Neither will the servile condition of the Israelites in Egypt be disputed. The description in Exodus is precisely in accordance with what we find on the Egyptian monuments, and contains, therefore, the strongest internal evidence of its truth. By what means, then, were a race of slaves enabled, not merely to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of their conquerors, but to take possession of a land which we have daily increasing evidence for believing had been only second to that of Egypt in wealth and military resources ? * That the Exodus did take place there can be no doubt. It is described by Egyptian, by Greek, and by Latin writers. And the accounts which have been handed down to us by Josephus, † by Diodorus, ‡ and by Tacitus, § are more improbable than the Mosaic account, if the miracles be conceded. On the other hand, if the miracles be not conceded, the narrative of Moses becomes a tissue of inconsistencies. The narrative, as is admitted, is natural and artless enough. But the miracles are recorded in as natural and artless a manner as the rest of the narrative. And further, the rest of the narrative becomes utterly absurd and unintelligible without them. Moses appears

* The Hittites, at least, were an important people. But their empire had received its death-blow just previous to the Exodus. It is to be hoped that the late discoveries on this point will soon be more accessible to the historical student than they are at present. He must now painfully collect his information from the columns of the *Times*, or the records of learned societies, or the scattered hints contained in the recent translations of Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions. It may not be out of place here, however, to state that Mr. Rassam has recovered the bronze gates of Carchemish, the Hittite capital, and that Captain Conder has identified the situation of Kadesh, the sacred city of this long-forgotten people.

† Against Apion, Book I.

‡ In a fragment preserved by Photius.

§ Hist. v., 3.

before the Israelites as a man who had once held authority among the Egyptians, but had for forty years been a fugitive in a foreign land, and now appears, without influence, without means, without appliances, relying simply on a vision he declares himself to have seen in the wilderness, and attempts to persuade his countrymen to throw off the yoke of the king of Egypt, and to accompany him in a hazardous expedition into an adjoining country in hopes of subduing it. The history confesses, naturally enough, that this extraordinary proposition was received with incredulity and contempt by those to whom it was made, and that it excited the strongest indignation in the breast of the powerful monarch who was expected tamely to submit to it. This is undeniably rational and probable, though it was extremely unlikely to have been invented by a narrator of fable. But by what means was the unwillingness of the Israelites overcome, and the anger of a despotic ruler successfully braved? Without the narrative of the plagues of Egypt, the narrative, up to this point so natural and credible, becomes utterly inconceivable. The Israelites have submitted for years, perhaps for centuries, to tyranny of the most degrading kind, and never appear even to have contemplated resistance or deliverance. It is quite in accordance with this fact that Moses does not invite them to rise against their oppressors. No hint is given of a battle, of anything approaching to an appeal to arms, or even of any desire to appeal to arms, on the part of the subject people. Not that the whole narrative ignores any use of such means. The Israelites fight the Amalekites,* the Amorites,† the Canaanites.‡ And the Book of Joshua, which is separated by no wide gulf, either of style or incident, from the books of Moses, is a history of continued and successful

* Exod. xvii. 8-13.

† Numb. xxi. 24.

‡ Numb. xiv. 45.

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warfare. There is no reason whatever, therefore, if the Exodus had been accomplished by the ordinary means of rebellion, namely war, that the victories of Israel should not have been recorded. If battles were actually fought, how is it that no mention is made of them? And if no battles were fought, how did the Israelites effect their departure? How were they even persuaded to attempt it? Their reluctance is admitted. Had the whole history been an invention, it would have been denied. On the other hand, that they did depart is a clear historical fact. The account we have of it is natural and intelligible upon the supposition of its truth. On any other supposition it is absolutely inexplicable. Deduct the miracles, and there remains the fact that the Israelites contrived, numerous as they were, to leave Egypt. The king of this great country strongly objects to their departure, but makes no attempt to prevent it. Yet the task is evidently a hazardous one, even from the Scripture account. They are compelled to depart in such haste that a national festival was established, which is still observed, of a meal eaten as by men preparing to depart suddenly on a journey of much difficulty and danger. But the journey is commenced, in the face of a jealous monarch and a hostile people. The first thing which the self-constituted leader does is to lead the people into a *cul de sac*, whither the Egyptians, having recovered from their alarm, proceed to follow in order to annihilate them. The Israelites, very naturally, remonstrate with their leader for his folly and incapacity in thus leading them into a situation in which they can neither fight nor fly. In this case, again, without the miraculous element, the narrative becomes a tissue of contradictions. Moses displays neither dismay nor hesitation under circumstances so untoward, though a leader not under supernatural guidance would

have been sure to have felt both. Had a means been accidentally afforded to the Israelites of extrication from their perilous position, we should doubtless have been told that Moses shared the dismay of the people, even if the occurrence had been held to be a miraculous interposition on their behalf. We find such feelings expressed by Ezra on a similar occasion.* But nothing of the kind is told us here. We find Moses perfectly calm, relying on the Divine protection. Nor does his hope disappoint him, as it is wont to fail impostors or enthusiasts at the critical moment. He describes himself as lifting up his rod, and at once a passage revealed itself through the waters, which enabled the Israelites to effect a safe retreat, but which proved fatal to their adversaries, and thus the Exodus became an accomplished fact. It is not supposed that any amount of testimony can be beyond the reach of cavil. But at least we have here a combination of circumstances in a narrative which must be pronounced unique. Here is an account of an historical transaction, which, on the supposition of the possibility of miracles, is perfectly simple, natural, and reasonable. Every attempt to account otherwise for the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and their entrance into Palestine has utterly failed. If such an explanation has been hazarded, it has had a brief and enthusiastic reception, and then has been cast aside for another, which was destined to a similar fate. And the account itself, once more, is inexplicable without the miraculous element. Had the narrative been intended as a glorification of the Israelite people, no mention would have been made of the frequent rebellions of the nation against its leader. Had it been a fabrication throughout, it is a marvel how it ever came to be believed. The notion that in the brighter days of Israel a

* Ezra viii. 22.

narrative could have been palmed off upon them which represented them in such unfavourable colours, has been given up. It has been contended that in the days of Israel's decline the priestly party were enabled to invent a narrative of national disobedience to its covenant God, which received ready credence. If so, it is a fact that stands alone. It can only be maintained by boldly denying the authenticity of documents upon the most violent linguistic theories. It utterly fails to account for the origin of the national feasts. And the creation of a belief in the Divine origin of a recent imposture, a belief sufficiently strong to resist so severe a shock as the Babylonish captivity, is, if it really happened, a fact without a parallel. Those who believe it have to explain the marvellous psychological curiosity which is involved in this theory, as well as to invent an account of the origin of the Old Testament, which will not only serve as a convenient means of escape for those who wish to disbelieve in miracles, but which is itself strong enough to defy the assaults of destructive criticism.

But to proceed with the narrative. Once again we come to a point where the natural and supernatural mutually support each other. It appears that the commissariat arrangements for the sustenance of this vast host in the wilderness were of the most meagre kind, as might have been expected from the hurried departure.* Accordingly the want of provisions soon began to make itself felt, and naturally enough the want of forethought on the part of the leader who had led them into such straits was once more energetically denounced. Slavery, it was said, was better than starvation. And again the answer to the complaints is a miraculous one. A regular supply of food and water accompanies the Israelites on their march, and by this they

* Exod. xii.

are sustained for forty years. This is at least as probable in itself as the flock of wild asses which Tacitus mentions,* and becomes infinitely more so under the supposition on which the Scripture narrative proceeds. Yet once again, when the prophet has led the people to the borders of the promised land, and their unwarlike spirits are oppressed by the magnitude of the task before them, their leader, instead of regarding this as a natural feeling, which it were his wisdom to remove by persuasion, reproves it severely as a sin of the most grievous kind, only to be expiated by forty years wandering in the wilderness. On what ground can this conduct of Moses be explained, save that on which he himself explains it, that the people had been encouraged by so many and so signal instances of the Divine presence and support, that doubt or fear on their part was altogether inexcusable?†

Thus, then, the history of the exodus from Egypt is either a tissue of absurdities, or a rational and credible narrative of Divine interpositions. If it be the former, we have to explain both the circumstances themselves, and the fact that this contemporary account of the circumstances came to be so soon believed. It has moreover too many marks of historical accuracy to be regarded as a collection of myths. It was written by one familiar with Egypt.‡ It contains an account of the deluge, which shows its author to have had access to Chaldean tra-

* Hist. v. 3.

† We cannot enter into the question here, but we may remark that the authenticity of the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram is supported by a remarkable undesigned coincidence. See Blunt, "Undesigned Coincidences," Part I.

‡ The term "Abrech" (bow the knee, Gen. xli. 43) is an Egyptian term. The Egyptian word "Ach" is used of the papyrus of the Nile (Exod. ii. 3). Zaphnath-paaneah, the name given to Joseph (Gen. xli.

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ditions.* Its geographical accuracy has been conclusively established. And although certain apparent discrepancies and improbabilities have been attempted to be made out in various portions of the narrative, these objections have been successfully refuted, while the argument in its favour from undesigned coincidences,† the most powerful possible, is studiously ignored by the assailants of the Scripture narrative. This course can hardly escape the reproach of disingenuousness. To pass by without mention a whole line of defence, and that the most cogent of all in its character, is tantamount to a confession of the weakness of the case against it. We can but touch on this branch of the subject. It belongs more properly to the question of the authenticity of the Books of Scripture. But this much we may say, that many of the miracles of the Old Testament are inextricably embedded in what these undesigned coincidences prove to be authentic history. It is impossible, in most cases, to detach the miracle from the ordinary narrative.‡ And if the undesigned tokens of accuracy,

45), is an Egyptian name. The Egyptian name of the Nile is used. The name Moses itself is supposed to have an Egyptian origin. And even the details of the narrative are in exact agreement with the Egyptian monuments.

* The tradition of the Chaldean Xisuthrus is precisely similar in its main features to that of Noah. And this last is given us by a descendant of one who came from "Ur of the Chaldees."

† See Graves on the Pentateuch; Blunt, "Undesigned Coincidences;" Paley, *Horæ Paulinæ*.

‡ Thus, if we doubt the miraculous passage of the Jordan, we have to explain (*a*) how it was this passage was never disputed, (*b*) that no attempt was made to meet the enemy in the open field until the alarm created by the submission of Gibeon drove the kings of Southern Palestine into a hasty confederacy. Rahab's words (Josh. ii, 9, 10) throw a light upon the matter which it has received from no other source. That almost inconceivable folly and incapacity may sometimes

which the author inartificially lets drop, prove that he is telling the truth in the ordinary events he narrates, the same evidence establishes the authenticity of the miracle, which, as has been proved, must stand or fall with it. These considerations, moreover, have some bearing even on the case of miracles not so inextricably intertwined with the history. If *some* miracles be proved to be credible, *all* miracles are proved to be not incredible. And those which are not, like those recorded in the Pentateuch, attested by that minuteness and variety of proof which can be adduced in favour of the particular miracles of the Exodus, may safely be left to stand or fall with the general credibility of the Old Testament narrative.

II. We come next to the review of the miracles of the New Testament. And here we may remark at the outset, that all attempts to explain the origin of the New Testament narrative, or the character of Jesus Christ, or the recorded events of His life, otherwise than as contemporary narratives of an historical character, have conspicuously failed. As regards the myth theory, which has found some advocates, the circumstances are utterly fatal to it. For the growth of a myth there is required first, a very considerable lapse of years, second, a people in a very rudimentary condition of intelligence and training, and third, a very great dearth of historical information concerning the age in which the myth was supposed to originate. That the first

be displayed under critical circumstances is not denied. But history usually makes some allusion to the causes of such folly and incapacity. The only explanation we meet with here is, that a stupor had seized on the inhabitants of Palestine by reason of the strange marvels which had accompanied the Israelites on their march. It is reasonable, however, to suppose that the courage of despair may have animated the Canaanite people when they saw the terrible fate of Jericho and Ai.

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of these conditions is wanting, can hardly be denied. Persecutions of His disciples are recorded, even on heathen authority, within thirty-five years of the death of Jesus Christ,* and that in the capital of the Empire, at a considerable distance from the scene of His teaching. And from that time onward there is a continuous external testimony to the existence of the religious body He had formed.† The second condition is as conspicuously absent. The age was one of the highest civilization and literary culture. Externally, at least, Rome was in the zenith of her power and prosperity, though keen observers were not wanting who could foresee her approaching decay. The provinces shared to the full the advantages of the capital. Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, were the seats of great commercial activity, and may compare not unfavourably for intelligence, energy, and culture with Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds in our own country. A few years back the latter cities did not surpass the former in population,‡ while in point of magnificence, the palm must be given to the cities of the ancient world. Alexandria and Athens, as seats of learning and thought, would compare not altogether unfavourably with the Oxford and Cambridge of the present day. The province of Judæa was by no means a contrast to other provinces of the Roman empire. Though not on a level with Syria or Egypt or Greece, she shared their

* Tacitus, "Annals," xv. 44.

† See Pliny's Letter to Trajan.

‡ The immense impetus given to manufactures in the present century has vastly increased the size of our provincial towns. But at the beginning of the century the parallel would have been accurate enough. The population of Antioch is computed by St. Chrysostom at 200,000. That of Ephesus would hardly be much less. Corinth is supposed to have had about 80,000 inhabitants.

advantages to a considerable extent. Under the sway of the princes of the Hasmonæan line, cities like Jerusalem, Cæsarea Stratonis, and Cæsarea Philippi had become by no means insignificant. And the presence in Judæa of a Roman procurator secured a considerable intercourse between this province and the metropolis. As to the third of the requisites for the origin of a myth, nothing could be more entirely absent at the age of which we are speaking. Men of cultivated intelligence, engaged in the production, not of myths, but of the sort of works read by men of education and refinement, were never more abundant.* And it was especially the age of history. Not only was it the period of Livy, Tacitus, and other well-known writers, but the Jewish historian, Josephus, a man in high favour with the Roman authorities, made the records of his own country his special study, and he has left us a carefully finished picture of the state of Palestine in his time.†

Thus, then, there appears very little probability that the attempt to convert Jesus Christ into a myth would be likely to succeed. It has, indeed, almost died out in the land of its birth. Into the evidence for the authenticity of the Scriptures we shall briefly enter below. But it may be as well to explain here why it is impossible to regard this authen-

* The Augustan age, with its brilliant circle of writers, has passed into a proverb.

† The genuineness of the fragment relating to Jesus Christ has been disputed, as indeed has every direct mention of Him. This wholesale attempt at the destruction of all contemporary reference to Christ, while it in no way invalidates the evidence that Jesus Christ really existed, which may be proved on other grounds (see above), betrays the desperate shifts to which the opponents of Christianity are reduced. But even were we to admit the spuriousness of the passage, we could not escape from the admission that the silence of Josephus was designed. See below, pp. 183, 202.

ticity as disproved. Successive assaults upon the New Testament have been repelled even more victoriously than those on the Old. The assailants are continually changing their ground. But it may safely be said, that in the last controversy on the subject, the honours of the conflict were certainly not carried off by the opponent of Christianity.*

Three other considerations may here be briefly noticed, on the point of the contemporary character of the memoirs of Jesus Christ. First, the disappearance of every contemporary account of Jesus Christ—for if the present four Gospels be written, as is contended, not earlier than the middle of the second century, all the original lives of Jesus Christ must have disappeared—is hardly compatible with the deep interest which must, from the beginning, have been felt in a person who must on all hands be admitted to be one of the most remarkable characters in the world's history. And next, if we cast aside all the Gospels as later fabrications, we are still confronted by the fact, that the main features of the narrative, the miracles, and the divine character of the worker included, are inextricably embedded in the other evidence we have for His life. To get rid of the miraculous, you must not only destroy the credit of the four Gospels, but what is a still more difficult task, of the Epistles of St. Paul, and of the writings of Clement of Rome, of Ignatius, of Polycarp, of Justin Martyr.† And lastly, it is usually possible in the case of legendary history,

* The controversy referred to is that which took place between the author of a book called "Supernatural Religion" and the Bishop of Durham, then Professor Lightfoot, in 1875. The papers of the latter in the *Contemporary Review*, compelled the former writer to re-write some of the most important passages of his work in the next edition—a proceeding which is not usually regarded as indicative of victory in a contest.

† See "The Lost Gospel," by Prebendary Sadler.

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to show how it originated, to trace the gradual accretion of legend round the original simple story. In this case it is impossible. The story of Christ's Life, Death, and Resurrection has been told from the beginning just as it is told now, and the only resource of His antagonists is to sweep away all testimony whatever to His existence. *Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.* They boldly deny the genuineness of all the historical evidence, and call the process scientific criticism, and the result history.

1. We will now enter into a more detailed inquiry into the nature of the evidence by which these alleged facts are supported. And our first consideration will be the *documentary testimony* which can be brought in their favour. On behalf of the authenticity of these books, a complete chain of evidence from the beginning can be produced. Never was the authenticity of books so eagerly disputed. Never before has such a weight of testimony been brought forward in the support of any. In the case of ordinary books, books on the faith of which all ancient history is written, a mention of the book three or four centuries after it was written is sufficient to identify it, and to establish its claim on our acceptance.* Compare this with the testimony we shall adduce on behalf of the books of the New Testament, and it must be admitted that if the facts to be believed require stronger testimony than usual, the requirement has been very fully complied with. From the very time that they were written to our own, they have been recognized and quoted as authentic narratives. Clement, Bishop of Rome, usually supposed to be the Clement mentioned in Phil. iv. 17, wrote an Epistle to

* Thus Schlegel, in his "Lectures on Dramatic Literature," is content to accept a play of Sophocles on the evidence of Cicero, four centuries later.

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the Church at Corinth while St. John was yet living.* In it he quotes the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, and a saying of Christ only found in the Acts of the Apostles. He also quotes St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. James, and makes long citations from the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is true, he does not mention by name the books he quotes. This was not the custom of his day. But the books themselves are proved to have been in existence at the time he quotes them, and in the Gospels he quotes the words he reproduces as the words of Jesus Himself. One book of the New Testament he mentions by name, and in such form as proves it to be the book we now have. This is the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which he describes as having been written to that Church by St. Paul, at the beginning of the Gospel. The Epistle of Barnabas, again, though clearly not written by Barnabas the Apostle, was as clearly written within a few years of the Epistle of Clement, and perhaps during the life-time of St. John. Here we find, though the Epistle is a short one, a direct quotation of a passage found in the Gospel of St. Matthew as Scripture, and other quotations of passages found in the three Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. There are references to St. John's Gospel—though perhaps they do not amount to actual quotations—as well as allusions to some of the Apostolic Epistles. We come next to the Epistles of Ignatius, of whom we learn that he was appointed by the Apostles Bishop of Antioch.† And here we quote from the version of his Epistles usually

* The historical evidence points to the year 97, when St. John had been banished to Patmos.

† Eusebius, "Ecclesiastical History," III., 36. He was a disciple of St. John, we are told, in the contemporary account of his martyrdom.

acknowledged as such by scholars.* He quotes the four Gospels; refers, in his letter to the Ephesians, to St. Paul's letter to that Church, and makes very distinct allusions to most of the Apostolic writings. We proceed to Polycarp, who is known to have been personally intimate with the Apostle St. John. He wrote an Epistle to the Philippians. In that short Epistle he refers distinctly to St. Paul's letter to that Church. He quotes directly the Epistle of St. John. He quotes the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke. He cites a passage from the Acts of the Apostles, as well as passages from the Epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter, and perhaps St. Jude. Irenæus, the pupil of St. Polycarp, cites the whole of the Scriptures of the New Testament, just as any modern clergyman would do. Papias,† the pupil of the Apostles, composed a Harmony of the Four Gospels; and to complete our list, Tertullian, writing from one hundred to one hundred and fifty years after they were published, and with full access to proofs of their genuineness now lost, supplies us, in his treatise against Marcion, with a brief abstract of nearly all the books of the New Testament, which proves that those books are precisely the same as those we have now.

Such is a short summary of the historical evidence for the genuineness of the narratives of the life of Christ, and of the writings of the first preachers of His Gospel. It is impossible to do more here than to glance at this evidence. The study of the arguments for the genuineness of the Scriptures belongs to another branch of evidential science. But it must not be forgotten that, as has before been inti-

* A long controversy has raged on this subject for centuries. It is obviously beyond our province to do more than mention the fact.

† Eusebius, "*Ecclesiastical History*" III., 39. Or rather, perhaps, as he himself describes it, a pupil of those who had heard the Apostles.

mated, were all the four Gospels proved to be spurious, the difficulty would not be removed. The main features of the life of Christ, with its miraculous adjuncts, could be recovered from the Epistles of the New Testament. And it is obvious, from the very nature of their origin, that successfully to forge, in a later age, an Epistle such as most of those of St. Paul, would be a task even of greater difficulty than to invent a fictitious life of Christ. Lastly, there is the argument from "undesigned coincidences," which is by far the weightiest of all, and may be studied in the "*Horæ Paulinæ*" of Paley, and in the "*Undesigned Coincidences*" of the late Professor Blunt. The main point of this argument is to show that there are so many instances of artless and utterly undesigned agreement between the writers of the books of the New Testament, as to put it quite beyond the bounds of possibility that these writings could have been fabricated at a later date.

This brief and, from our limits, necessarily unsatisfactory reference to a whole world of controversy on the authenticity of the books of the New Testament will not have been without its value if it has impressed upon the reader the fact that no honest man can pretend to dismiss the whole question with a smile or a sneer. When M. Reville* admits, for instance, that every assault on the genuineness of St. John's Gospel, up to his own, has been successfully repulsed; when a writer, whose entry into the arena of controversy was lately heralded by a quite unprecedented flourish of trumpets, was obliged to make an ignominious exit from the scene upon the appearance thereon of a bishop of the Church of England, we may safely say that the question of the authenticity of the Scripture narrative is at least one which demands the serious attention of every rational

* "*Revue des Deux Mondes*," May 1866.

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man. And if the authenticity of the Scriptures be a question into which every man is bound seriously and earnestly to enter, then is he also bound, before expressing disbelief, to enter with equal seriousness and earnestness into the question of the evidence for miracles; for the two questions stand or fall together.*

2. Our next point is that the evidence we have in favour of the reality of the Gospel history is trustworthy evidence. And here we may state the question in the words of Paley. We may direct attention to the facts—(a) that “there is satisfactory evidence that many, professing to be original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passed their lives in labours, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and solely in consequence of their belief in such accounts, and that they also submitted, from the same motives, to new rules of conduct,” and (b) that “there is not satisfactory evidence that persons professing to be original witnesses of other miracles, in their nature as certain as these are, have ever acted in the same manner, in attestation of the accounts which they delivered, and properly in consequence of those accounts.” It is true that exception has been taken to these propositions of Paley as a proof of Christianity, and it may be admitted that, regarded as such a proof, or attempt at proof, they are too exclusively external in their nature, and that they do not take into account many of those inner and deeper considerations which cannot be left unnoticed in dealing with the question of the reality of a Divine Revelation. But the subject with which we are dealing in these

* On this subject the inquirer may profitably consult Paley’s “Evidences,” Lardner’s “Credibility,” Westcott on “The Canon,” beside a host of special works which confine themselves to the authenticity of particular books.

pages is not the truth of Christianity as a whole, but the question whether certain alleged facts have or have not occurred. And when once the possibility of such occurrence has been demonstrated, the question becomes simply one of external evidence, and as a question of external evidence it cannot be denied that these considerations of Paley are of great weight. For if a man devote himself for life to the proclamation of a fact or set of facts which he asserts to have occurred; if in the process of such proclamation he exposes himself to much inconvenience and opposition; if he shrink from no labour, excuse himself no pains, that he may prosecute such a proclamation; if he persist in his assertion of the truth of what he alleges in spite of danger, violence, persecution; if in the end he seal his testimony with his blood, it can hardly be denied that at least he must himself have believed what he said.*

(1) This consideration precludes all possibility of *imposture*. The coarsest charges were flung out against the Apostles by the sceptics of the last century. Such phrases as "notorious cheat," "barefaced imposture," and the like, were common in the first violence of the onslaught against Christianity. But this line of argument has been abandoned by educated

* Paley's words on this point are so striking that they ought not to be omitted. He says, in reference to evidence of this kind, "When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician the first thing he does with it is to try it upon a simple case, and if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible they could be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they

men. It lingers only in the coarse invective of the socialist lecturer. When a man devotes his life to the work of imposture, he takes care that he shall have something tangible for his pains. Alexander of Abonoteichos and Apollonius of Tyana took care to be well paid for their pretended marvels. Simon Magus and other early impostors not only made a gain of their juggleries and sorceries, but they abused them to every immoral purpose. But if the Apostles were impostors, they were impostors such as the world never saw before or since. They cheated the world by their notorious arts into justice, purity, truth, and love.* They founded a society in which "no man said that aught of the things which he possessed were his own, but they had all things common." They introduced a principle into the world which shamed corruption, abolished slavery, tamed barbarism, elevated family life, robbed war of its worst horrors, and has finally consolidated civil liberty and social order. What St. Paul—to say nothing of the other apostles—managed to gain for himself by his deceptions is related in the Acts of the Apostles, and above all in the eleventh chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burned, or strangled, rather than give up their account, still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity" ("Evidences, Preparatory Considerations").

* "Who would reasonably say," asked Origen, more than fifteen centuries and a half ago, "that the better life which Christianity has produced, diminishing as it does daily the number of a man's offences, could possibly proceed from deceit?" ("Against Celsus," ii., 50.)

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He describes himself as excelling other preachers of the Gospel simply in being "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." After a vivid account of the perils to which his unwearied proclamation of the truths of the Gospel exposed him, he adds that he was "in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness; beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." Surely in such an imposture as this *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*—the end was not worth all the trouble taken to attain it. For a man to pretend to be a witness to the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ when he knew he was not, and to gain nothing but voluntary poverty, perpetual danger, incessant toil, unparalleled self-sacrifice, innumerable cares and anxieties, were surely the strangest conduct of which a man could be capable.* Nor was it in order to obtain licence to indulge earthly passions that such statements were made. Every single word of the New Testament gives a direct contradiction to such a supposition. No suspicion of dishonesty, or licence in morals, or laxity of principle, ever rested upon the Apostles. They strove to inculcate upon their converts the utmost purity, fairness, honesty, truthfulness,—in a word, absolute self-renunciation. They pressed upon poor and already heavily burdened communities the duty of relieving the necessities

* If it be said that St. Paul did *not* affirm that he was a witness of the miracles of Christ, it will not be denied that other people were, and they condemned themselves to a life similar to that of St. Paul. And St. Paul himself declares that the Lord appeared to him, and unless we very much misunderstand his language, that He communicated to him the facts concerning the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. See 1 Cor. xi. 23.

of those poorer still. They invited the society they had formed to undertake the maintenance of the aged among their number who had no friends to maintain them, in consideration of their performing such good offices as they were still able to render to the community.* Altogether, their aim appears to have been to unite their disciples into a brotherhood, in which all distinctions of rank or nationality were forgotten, and in which each vied with the other in the discharge of the highest offices of love. Truly a strange office, this, for the confederates in a shameless imposture to have undertaken at much toil and cost. And stranger still that by the use of such means they should have succeeded so well.†

(2) But if the Apostles were not impostors, they might have been *enthusiasts*. They might have allowed their affection for Christ to blind them to the true facts of the case. They might have brooded so long and so earnestly

* 1 Tim. v. 9.

† It will be observed that we have not laid so much stress as usual upon the argument that there are no instances of men's suffering and dying in an obstinate assertion of the truth of facts proved to be false. We have rather insisted on the fact that nothing but pain and suffering could possibly have been gained by the Apostles (except the good of mankind), and that this fact was evident to any man of ordinary sense from the beginning. The reason, however, of the frequent persistence of detected criminals in falsehood is well put by Dr. Sherlock, "Tryal of the Witnesses," p. 105: "I remember a story of a man who endured with great constancy all the tortures of the rack, denying the fact with which he was charged. When he was asked afterwards how he could hold out against all the tortures, he answered, 'I had painted a gallows upon the toe of my shoe, and when the rack stretched me, I looked on the gallows and bore the pain to save my life.' This man denied a plain fact, under great torture, but you see a reason for it." The Apostles had a far simpler mode of saving their lives open to them. It was to cease to make the assertions which brought them into so great danger.

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on the excellences of their departed Master, that they came at last to regard Him as Divine. Their imagination might have dwelt upon the wonders of His life and teaching, the immense influence He had upon those whom He addressed, the strangely encouraging and enlivening power of His personal presence, until they fancied that He had worked wonders which never had any existence, save in their own overwrought minds. It may have been so. And yet we may observe that their lives and conduct showed very little of the enthusiast. An enthusiast is great at eager and heated declamation, but it is difficult to pin him to exact statements of fact. In his condition of excitement, he resents most strongly any attempt to bring him down to a minute particularity of names or dates. And in other ways it is difficult to bring him to close quarters. He has an uneasy consciousness that his assertions will not stand the test of reason or examination. And therefore, without intentional dishonesty, he evades all application of those rigid tests by which the accuracy of statements of fact is established or overthrown. Apply this rule to the conduct of the Apostles. It will be found that their conduct was the very opposite. The most precise statements of the locality and circumstances of each miracle were made, and every opportunity given to inquirers to examine into the particulars. Let us speak first of the written accounts of the life of Christ and His Apostles. There is, at least, no indefiniteness about them. St. Matthew's Gospel was published at Jerusalem probably within fifteen years of the events recorded in its pages. The statements made throughout were such as could have been investigated by any who were doubtful of their truth. The place chosen for its publication was most probably the capital of the country in which the events related were said to have occurred. The statements

made are definite and precise. The localities in which they happened are distinctly specified. Names are frequently given, especially in the case of the most remarkable miracle recorded,—that of the raising of Jairus' daughter. The account of the feeding of the four and five thousand was one which could easily be verified on the spot. The cure of the demoniacs at Gadara, and the extraordinary incident of the destruction of the swine connected with it, might easily have been investigated. Sufficient *data* at least are given for the task. And as the names of the Apostles were given, it would have been easy enough to interrogate their kindred and friends concerning the nature of the incidents recorded. We purposely refrain here from touching on the evidence for the greatest miracle of all, which will be treated below. Nor shall we insist at present on the importance of the Gospel of St. John, because it was published some sixty years after the events recorded. But we may remark that St. Matthew's Gospel was followed, at no very great distance of time, by two other narratives, containing matter sufficiently different in its arrangement to manifest an independent origin, but witnessing to substantially the same facts. Nor is there the slightest vagueness or extravagance in the narratives. They are extraordinarily clear and calm. There are no outbursts of declamation or enthusiasm. The most remarkable miracles are related in precisely the same manner as the most ordinary occurrences. The utmost simplicity and sobriety, combined with the firmest conviction, distinguishes the narrative throughout. Again, no attempt whatever was made to escape investigation. An enthusiast who feels that his enthusiasm is not supported by too solid a substratum of fact not only objects to investigation, he eludes it. He is careful not to allow himself to be driven into a

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corner by those matter-of-fact persons who insist upon having every point cleared up to their satisfaction. It was just that very class of persons which the course of action pursued by the Apostles was best calculated to satisfy. They were particularly charged not to leave Jerusalem until they had made good their footing there. This was exactly what common sense would have advised if their statements *were* true, exactly what the most ordinary instinct would have avoided if the statements were *not* true, or if there were any uncertainty whatever about them. It was impossible but that there must have been at Jerusalem men of keen and critical minds, who could have exploded the whole delusion if it had no solid foundation. The only reason why it gained ground there as elsewhere must have been, that it was founded on facts which could bear investigation. The dreams of enthusiasts attract attention for a while among the flighty or excitable among persons incapable of estimating the value of evidence. But when their fancies cannot sustain the test of reason, the excitement dies away, the delusion is dissipated, and the whole story soon becomes discredited. If it was otherwise with the assertions made by the Apostles, it could only have been because those assertions were true. Or, if this conclusion be disputed, let those who dispute it give one single other instance of either impostors or enthusiasts, who were thus calm and rational, who thus courted investigation, and who were similarly successful.

And then the whole after course of the Apostles, while it plainly betokens the strongest possible *conviction*, is entirely free from the least suspicion of ill-regulated enthusiasm. What could be more absolutely calm and rational than the manner in which they propagated their doctrines and founded their society? In every case they were charged

to make their tidings known first to the Jews; that is, to those who by reason of their constant resort to Jerusalem were best qualified to inquire into the truth of what was said. Neither ill-regulated enthusiasm nor imposture would have suggested such a course. It could only be dictated by the fullest persuasion that what the Apostles had to say could sustain such an inquiry. It is true, no doubt, that the Jews very frequently rejected the tidings. But then we find that they did this upon a foregone conclusion. Two considerations weighed with them in rejecting the Apostolic testimony. They were convinced that the expected Messiah was to be a temporal prince, who was to subdue all nations beneath a temporal yoke. And they were firmly resolved never to admit the Gentiles to equal privileges with themselves. These convictions were so firmly rooted in their minds as to justify them, in their own opinion, in refusing to enter into the evidence thus offered them. But they did not disprove the assertions made by the first preachers of Christianity. They had the means of exposing the imposture, if it were one, of showing how unfounded were the wild stories thus spread abroad, if they had no solid foundation. They had the means, and they most certainly had the will. If they did not succeed in thoroughly discrediting the Christian accounts of the miraculous works of Christ, it was not because they spared themselves the pains, for they laboured incessantly to discredit the Christian cause. It could only have been because the facts were too strong for them. In spite of their most vehement efforts, efforts which were often very embarrassing to the preachers of the new religion, by compelling them to leave a place where they were beginning to teach with success, the story of the Gospels found new adherents everywhere. And those who held it displayed neither

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hurry nor embarrassment. They had apparently no fear whatever of the fullest investigation. On the contrary, they courted it. They followed in every place the course which they had pursued in Jerusalem. They stayed in each city of importance for a considerable period, during which they discussed in all its bearings the message they had come to proclaim with every one who presented himself.* There were plenty of opportunities of examining into the truth of the story they told. There was much intercourse at that time between the various provinces of the Roman Empire. Palestine was easy of access from Greece and Asia Minor. And Jerusalem was itself no mean city. It has been lately insinuated, in a French work of fiction,† that our Lord worked all His miracles among the ignorant and credulous mountain folk of Galilee. But the truth is that many of the most startling of those miracles were wrought in Jerusalem itself.‡ This made the task of exploding the fiction of the Resurrection of Jesus, if it were a fiction, all the easier. In every city of any importance, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, a colony of Jews was to be found, who had not only, as we have just seen, every interest in discrediting the tidings which were being so industriously spread abroad, but every means of doing so. Intelligent society, moreover, is not usually credulous, but sceptical, and it was in the midst of such society, in the centres of thought and intelligence, not in the holes and corners and byways of the earth, that the Apostles elected to proclaim their extraordinary message. Beside the intelligent portion of the population, there were

* See, for instance, Acts xviii. 4; xix. 8, 9.

† By MM. Erckmann-Chatrian, otherwise so creditably known to fame.

‡ *E.g.*, the raising of Lazarus and the Resurrection.

no doubt a vast number of ignorant persons, incapable of forming a sound judgment on questions of evidence. But the ignorant in heathen times were usually degraded, and the good tidings of Christianity, with its fervid exhortations to purity and mutual love, could not, and as a matter of fact they did not, receive a ready hearing from such as they. *Christianos ad leones* was the constant cry of the multitude on the occasions of public calamity. Thus, then, from the first, the promulgators of Christianity appealed to intelligent and cultivated society, and were refused a hearing by the low and degraded.* It is the opponents of Christianity who have to account for the spread of its doctrines under such unfavourable circumstances. Especially have they to deal with the fact that there was not the slightest attempt to steal a march upon society, not the slightest desire to evade inquiry, or to confuse the issues which were presented to the hearer. Enthusiasm, we have seen, evades inquiry, and shelters itself under cover of vague generalities. Note the difference of tone in the first preachers of the Gospel. "We saw it with our own eyes, and that in a way which could not be mistaken," they say. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." "We are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew, and hanged

* St. Paul, it is true, says that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," had joined the Christian Church (1 Cor. i. 26). But the whole tenor of the Epistle, and of the history of the spread of Christianity, shows that it was not among the ignorant or degraded that it first made its way. Like the Reformation, it was first embraced by the middle class, men too educated and too practical to be deluded by visionary fancies, too sobered by the serious business and responsibilities of life to disdain to inquire into evidence presented to them. Earnest men of rank, position, and education were from the first among its disciples.

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on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, *who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.*"* And not only so, but they appeal to these facts as known to their hearers. "Jesus of Nazareth" is spoken of by St. Peter in the hearing of all the people as "a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, *as ye yourselves also know.*"† And to the whole world, for St. Paul, after asking in the presence of the Jewish king and the Roman governor why it should be thought incredible that God should raise the dead, cries triumphantly at the end of his harangue, "This thing was not done in a corner."‡

Thus, then, we observe that both the earliest extant documents which record the origin of Christianity, and the conduct of its first teachers, according to the only accounts we possess of this conduct, are in direct opposition to the theory of excitement or fanatical enthusiasm. From the first every opportunity that could fairly be required was given to opponents to refute the statements made by the preachers of the new revelation. If the challenge was not accepted—and it is obvious enough that for nearly three centuries no one attempted to enter the lists with the Christians—it was from no indefiniteness in Christian statements of fact, no endeavour to escape from the disagreeable necessity of hearing them questioned. Nor can the incapacity of its opponents be pleaded for this strange silence. The literary activity of the Gentile world has been already mentioned. The Jewish world was no

* Acts ii. 32; x. 32; cf. iii. 15; iv. 20.

† Acts ii. 22.

‡ Acts xxvi. 8, 26.

less active. The schools of Hillel and Shammai were famous throughout the East. Josephus and Philo, the great Jewish historian and the great Jewish philosopher, were contemporary with the Apostles. And the two centuries immediately after Christ witnessed the herculean attempt to reduce to writing the mass of Jewish tradition which meets us in the Talmud. Even there a refutation of "the Nazarene," the heretic, is evaded. No attempt is made to grapple with the facts of His unique career.

And it may be added that the attempts in later times to account, otherwise than by the admission of its miraculous origin, for the spread of Christianity are almost as numerous as the persons who have attempted so to account for it.* Hypothesis after hypothesis has been advanced to explain the stubborn fact. But each has had in turn to be abandoned. In the face of circumstances such as these, we are entitled at least to conclude that a strong case has been made out for miracles. Of direct evidence in favour of their having occurred there is a considerable amount. Of rebutting evidence there is not a particle. The charges of imposture and unreasoning enthusiasm have been made, but they have not been sustained. All that can be brought against them is the general presumption, which we do not deny to be reasonable in itself, against the probability of the occurrence of miracles. But a general presumption of

* Gibbon's mode of dealing with the facts is not an uncommon, nor is it a very ingenuous one. It has thus been characterized by Dean Milman: "The main question, the Divine origin of the religion, is dexterously eluded or speciously conceded; his plan enables him to commence his account, in most parts, *below the apostolic times*; and it is only by the strength of the dark colouring with which he has brought out the failings and the follies of succeeding ages, that a shadow of doubt and suspicion is thrown back upon the primitive period of Christianity" (Notes on Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," chap. xv.)

this kind cannot, we contend, be pressed in the face of sufficient evidence.

3. We proceed to another step in our demonstration. We have further to contend that the miracles performed by Christ and His Apostles were the subjects of investigation. M. Renan denies that any investigation was made into the Christian miracles when they occurred.* This is simply untrue. On three different occasions were the miracles of Christ and His Apostles made the subject of something very like a judicial investigation. It is true that two of these occasions are related by the Evangelist St. John, and that those who deny the reality of the Scripture miracles have been driven by the necessity of their position to the desperate step of assailing the genuineness of the Gospel which goes by his name. Into this question we cannot, of course, enter here, further than the brief *résumé* of the arguments which we have already given.† The question has, however, been fully discussed, more fully, it may be added, than those who have assailed the Gospel care to take any account of.‡ And we may add that a comparison of the

* "Life of Christ," Introduction. M. Renan's exact words are that "miracles never happen but in times and countries where they are believed, and before persons willing to believe them." This statement at least demands qualification. Many of Christ's miracles were wrought in the presence of opponents, who, we read, were "filled with madness" at what was done. The account of the raising of Lazarus proves that all the spectators were far from being believers.

† Above, pp. 157-163.

‡ Nothing is more remarkable in the history of the controversy for or against Christianity than the habit its assailants have of ignoring all that has been said in its favour, and of repeating its well-worn fallacies as though they had not been refuted over and over again, or if not refuted, at least answered in a way which demands some notice. Thus Mr. M. Arnold, in his "God and the Bible," dismisses the questions of miracles and of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament,

two accounts we find in St. John harmonize exactly in tone and spirit with the account St. Luke has given us of similar proceedings in the Acts of the Apostles.* Moreover, the details in St. John's narrative of the inquiry into the miracle of the blind man in Chapter ix. are so natural and life-like that we may safely challenge the opponents of the authenticity of the Gospel to produce anything like it in the history of fiction, at least until Daniel Defoe, in the last century, reduced this kind of writing to a science.† At least it is a feature entirely absent from any fictitious or apocryphal

without giving his readers the least hint that men of the stamp of Professors Mozley and Westcott had written on these subjects. Later writers have repeated the stock statements about St. John's gospel without so much as referring to the masterly papers of the Bishop of Durham, then Professor Lightfoot, in the *Contemporary Review*. The Gospel of St. John, moreover, has met with many recent defenders, whose arguments might be thought at least to demand some answer. Not only have Professors Lightfoot and Westcott in England, and Luthardt in Germany, written on behalf of that Gospel, but the late Professor Ewald, whose free handling of the Old Testament has been arraigned above, says that "no man who does not knowingly choose error and reject truth can dare to say that the fourth Gospel is not the work of the Apostle St. John." Dr. Sanday has recently analyzed every single chapter of the Gospel, with a view of examining the internal evidence of authorship, in his "Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel." And I may be permitted to refer to my own "Doctrinal System of St. John," in which I have endeavoured to show that the only possible explanation of the form in which the doctrinal matter contained in the fourth Gospel comes down to us is, that the writer is accurately reporting to us the teaching of Jesus Christ.

* Compare St. John ix., and xi. 47-53, with Acts iv. 5-21.

† For an analysis of the chapter we must refer the reader to Dr. Sanday's work above mentioned. Professor Westcott remarked at the Brighton Congress that if the account in St. John ix. were indeed fiction, the writer must have been "an unknown Shakspere."

narratives of the age in which it appeared. If the narrative be genuine—and every attempt to invalidate its genuineness has conspicuously failed—it establishes the fact that an immediate and searching inquiry into the facts was made, that the man was identified, that his parents were sent for to ascertain whether the blindness was real, that, though unwilling witnesses, they corroborated his testimony in every particular, and that the authorities, finding themselves unable to shake the credit of his story, resorted to the impotent step of excommunication. In the eleventh chapter of the same Gospel we have another account of a discussion in the Jewish Sanhedrim of a yet more notable miracle, and of the expression by the high priest of his conviction that a cause supported by miracles which were undenied could only be stamped out by violence.* If we ask from whence the writer of the Gospel gained his information, an answer is supplied us in the casual statement that the “other disciple,” identified with the writer of the Gospel,† was “known unto the high priest.” The account in the Acts of the Apostles is of a very similar character. A lame man, well known in Jerusalem, at his usual post, begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, asked the Apostles Peter and John for a gift, but instead of money they seized him by the hand, and bade him arise and walk in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The event attracted immediate notice. The multitude rushed together, and the once lame man refused to let go of those who had so won-

* Origen (“Against Celsus,” ii. 48) remarks on the fact, which we cannot do more than touch on, how the very *ferocity* of these alleged resurrections bears testimony to the truth of the account. Had there been many, he shrewdly says, one might have suspected them to be inventions.

† Compare chap. xviii. 15 with xiii. 23, xix. 26, xx. 2, and xxi. 7, 20, 24, and little doubt will remain,

derfully healed him, so that of their identity there could be no doubt. The authorities immediately apprehended them, and a similar judicial inquiry took place to that which was instituted in the case of the blind man. The result of that inquiry was to establish the fact of the miracle beyond dispute. "They could say nothing against it," we find. They confessed that "a notable miracle had been done" by these men, and they admitted that "they could not deny it." And if it be contended that this is only the Christian report of what happened, it must be remembered on the other hand that, as we have seen, there was no lack of adversaries to expose the falsehood of that account, if such exposure were possible. Thus, then, the miracles were subjected to the test of hostile investigation, and they stood the test. And if it be objected that the investigation was not a scientific investigation, it may be replied that in matters of fact scientific men are no better investigators than others. Scientific men, as we have seen, have expressed themselves satisfied of the truth of the phenomena of spiritualism, and the reply of the incredulous has always been that such persons are very good experimentalists, but they are utterly astray on the laws of evidence.* The French Academy, it may be added, rejected at first, on purely scientific grounds, the evidence in favour of lightning conductors, vaccination, and meteorites. In fact, worse investigators than scientific observers, when prejudiced in favour of certain theories, could scarcely be found. While, if a legal inquiry be the best means of discovering truth, let it not be forgotten that twice, if we may not say three times,

* Their evidence on the matter of spiritualism has had stress laid on it above (chap. v.), not on account of its superior value to other evidence in the abstract, but because a scientific question was involved—viz., the possibility of the existence of other forces than those of physical nature.

were the Christian miracles made the subject of a legal inquiry, and that each time the fact of the occurrence of the miracle was conclusively established. Nor is this all. Legal inquiries were frequently held in connection with Christianity. Christ Himself underwent two examinations, one before the chief priests, another before Pilate. In neither of these were His miracles mentioned. Not that He was supposed to have wrought none. In that case He would never have attracted sufficient attention to have incurred the enmity of the leaders of the Jewish people, or to have brought about the demonstration of Palm Sunday. Moreover, one account tells us that it was the miracle of the raising of Lazarus which was the cause of the triumphal entry into the city. Whether, therefore, He wrought miracles or not, He was certainly *believed* to have wrought them. Not, again, that the miracles He had wrought, or was supposed to have wrought, were impostures or the delusions of a credulous populace. In that case their hollowness would eagerly have been exposed. No; the miracles were quietly dropped, because they did not suit the purpose of His accusers, and the charges of blasphemy or sedition were ingeniously brought to the front, according to the character of the court in which He was arraigned. And several of the accounts agree in representing Pilate—no very scrupulous or conscientious judge—as overawed on one occasion by a supernatural or superstitious dread, which is sufficient evidence that there was something mysterious about the acknowledged character and claims of the alleged Criminal then before him. If this argument, standing alone, be not absolutely conclusive, we are at least entitled to say as much as this—that there is absolutely no evidence that Jesus Christ attracted attention as a teacher in any other way than by the miracles He performed, and that it is

difficult to see why they were withdrawn from the judicial examination, except because they were inconvenient truths, which it was desirable, on the part of the accusers, to keep out of sight. St. Paul, again, was examined before two Roman governors and a Jewish kinglet. He did not dissemble his belief in the resurrection of Christ. Here, then, was an admirable opportunity to expose the whole imposture or delusion, if it were such, and to crush the troublesome Nazarene sect by a public and triumphant demonstration of its absurdity. Such things were not unknown in those times. Alexander was detected and disgraced by Lucian.* A host of pretended Messiahs were overthrown, and their followers dispersed. But no attempt was made to show the futility of the Christian belief, by either the Roman governors or Agrippa. Nor did the counsel for the Jews venture upon any such line of argument. Again were the Christian miracles and the Divine claims of Christ carefully kept in the background; nor is it easy to see why, except on the hypothesis that they were more easily evaded than explained.†

4. The next argument which we shall bring forward in favour of the Christian miracles is that they were *not denied by opponents*. That they were not denied in the Apostolic age, we have already seen. We have also seen that the only way of escape open to those who deny them, when confronted with the plain statement of the Jewish historian, Josephus, is to deny its genuineness in common with that of the Gospels, most, if not all, of the Epistles, and all the Christian writings for a century after Christ's death. But even if this very sweeping—and to reasonable men very startling—measure be allowed, the opponents of miracles

* See above, p. 126.

† See also Bishop Douglas, "Criterion of Miracles."

have not destroyed the miracles of Christ and His disciples. They even meet them in the Talmud, a collection of traditions of Jewish faith and practice which must have been reduced into shape about the middle of the second century.* There, in the midst of the writings of the enemies of Christianity, if the wonderful works of Christ are evaded, at least those of His servants are admitted. Are the adversaries of miracles resolved to eliminate this grudging admission of a most determined adversary? Even then they have not succeeded in eliminating Christian miracles from the history of the world. The public records of the Roman Empire testify to the fact of their occurrence. Justin Martyr,† writing about one hundred, and Tertullian ‡ writing about one hundred and fifty years after the events recorded, appeal to the "Acts of Pilate" in the Roman archives, as proofs of the substantial accuracy of the Gospel narrative, and we do not find that the challenge was ever taken up. Tiberius, moreover, the very emperor under whom Christ was crucified, proposed, we are told, to admit Him into the list of the Roman gods,§ a tolerably conclusive proof that He had done things beyond the power of mortal man. They are, again, to be found confessed in the pages of deliberate antagonists. In the works of Celsus, Porphyry, and the Emperor Julian, Christian miracles are not denied, though they are attributed to magic.|| The genuineness of these writers will hardly

* Schöttgen *Horæ Hebraicæ* IX., has quoted passages from the Talmud admitting that James, the Lord's brother, worked miracles. And the *Avoda Zara* states that Jesus worked miracles by stealing the sacred name of Jehovah out of the Temple.

† Apology, Chap. xxxv.

‡ Apology, Chap. xxi.

§ This story is told by Tertullian (Apology, Chap. v.), is believed by Lardner, doubted by Neander, and disbelieved by Gibbon.

|| Hierocles, an early opponent of Christianity, compares them unfavourably with those of Apollonius. Julian expressly says (if we may

be questioned. The opponents of miracles therefore shift their ground. They now "disable the judgment" of all writers of that age. Celsus, Porphyry, Julian, were no judges of evidence. They were not endued with the scientific acumen of later ages. In other words, they had not yet quite made up their minds to disbelieve in the supernatural at all hazards. Neither Celsus, Porphyry, nor Julian was devoid of intelligence. The first of the three has written an acute work against Christianity. Porphyry was a philosopher of some eminence. Julian was a philosopher, a statesman, a warrior, a man of the world. He was as well able to judge of evidence as any man who could be selected.* We may rely upon it, that if he, or any other antagonist of Christianity, had been able to scout the Christian miracles as impostures or ordinary events magnified into miracles, he would have done so. That none of them did so, but preferred to try and account for them by some evil agency, can only be explained on the ground that the evidence for them was very strong. Nor must we forget that in the lapse of ages, in the destruction of libraries and MSS., much of that evidence has since disappeared.

5. The next point on which we shall insist is the *number* and *success* of the miracles. The full importance of this argument will appear in the next chapter, when we come to speak of the spurious miracles with which it has been

believe Cyril of Alexandria) that Christ was the most skilful of all magicians. "Against Julian," Book iii.

* Julian did *not* reject Christianity upon the evidence. His position was that of a man disgusted with what he saw of its practical working in his own day. And it was not to be wondered at. The Christian Church had indeed "fallen from her high estate." But it would be interesting to inquire how much Julian's high moral tone, which felt itself so outraged by the conduct of so-called Christian bishops and Christian laymen, was itself a product of Christianity.

sought to confound them. But the very last thing that can be asserted of our Lord's miracles is, that they consisted of a few cases, arbitrarily selected from among those who applied to Him. Some, as for instance that at the Pool of Bethesda, were worked on persons who had not applied to Him for relief. But, to say nothing here of miracles of another kind, the cures wrought by Jesus Christ must be counted by thousands. His fame was so great that "multitudes," we read, followed Him. He "healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people," we are told. "They brought unto Him all sick people, that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and He healed them."* "He healed all that were sick," says St. Matthew in another place.† Great stress has been laid upon the confession that "He could do no mighty work" in Nazareth, "because of their unbelief." But there is no reason to suppose that He shrunk from working miracles in the presence of unbelievers. The very contrary has been seen to be the case. Nor have we any reason to suppose that Jesus failed to heal any that were brought to Him, for we read that "He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."‡ All that the narrative entitles us to infer is, that no opportunity was given to Jesus there for the display of His wonder-working power, by reason of the deep-seated prejudice against His person and claims.

6 Our next point will be, that Jesus Christ established an organization in order to commemorate the fact of His miraculous works, and to ensure their transmission to

* Matt. iv. 23, 24.

† Matt. viii. 16; cf. Luke iv. 40, v. 15.

‡ Mark vi. 5.

later ages. This organization was the Christian Church, which has existed from the famous "Day of Pentecost" mentioned in Acts ii. to our own age. That society has existed for eighteen centuries for the purpose of making known to men, not only the glad tidings of salvation through Christ, but also the fact that these glad tidings rested upon a miraculous foundation. Without the Resurrection of Christ there would have been no Christian Church and no Christian faith.* But that fact being taken for granted, it was the function of the Church to make known throughout all time "the manifold wisdom of God." In that Church an order of men was appointed to proclaim the fact of a risen Saviour. They were to proselytize "all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.† They were sent out on this mission as Christ was sent by the Father.‡ They were sent especially to be "witnesses of the resurrection" of the Saviour.§ And they made provision for the continuance of this testimony after their death. The charge which St. Paul had "committed" to Timothy, || he desired Timothy to "commit to faithful men, that they might be able to teach others also." And the result was that Christianity spread with incalculable rapidity. Pliny reports in the reign of Trajan, probably not twenty years later than the death of St. John, that the temples in Bithynia were almost deserted, by reason of the Christians who abounded, not only in the towns but in the villages.¶ Tacitus speaks of the "vast multitude" of

* 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17.

† Matt. xxviii. 28. Compare Mark xvi. 16.

‡ John xx. 21.

§ Acts i. 22. See also v. 8, and St. John xv. 27.

|| 1 Tim. i. 18.

¶ Ep. x. 97.

Christians who were to be found in his time.* Justin Martyr, writing not twenty years later than the date of Pliny's epistles, boasts there was "no nation, nor even uncivilized tribe dwelling in tents, in which prayer was not offered through a crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all."† Thirty or forty years later again, and Lucian (a heathen) represents the impostor Alexander as complaining that Pontus was full of Epicureans and Christians. "We are but of yesterday," eloquently cries Tertullian about the same time, "yet we have filled your cities, islands, towns and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum. We have left you nothing but the temples of your gods."‡ This marvellous progress, in spite of the worst which mob violence and organized persecution could do, testifies both to the firm belief which men had in the truth of the Gospel scheme, and to the efficiency of the methods employed in propagating it.§ Yet the last of these two causes is not sufficient to explain the success of Christianity. No mere external organization would have availed to extend a system based upon folly or fraud.|| No other supposition will meet the case than that some solid substratum of fact underlay

* "Annals," xv. 44. Tacitus was a contemporary of the Apostles. And the time to which he refers was six years after the writing of the Epistle to the Romans, and about sixty years after the resurrection of Christ. St. Paul himself (Phil. iv. 22), mentions disciples in Cæsar's household at that very time.

† Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, Chap. cxvii.

‡ Tertullian, Apology, Chap. xxxvii. See this subject more fully treated in "Paley's Evidences," Chap. ix.

§ "*No facts of human history can show any parallel, or even comparable provisions to secure their transmission. No events in human history can trace back to their origin by a line of transmission so complete and so powerful as the miracles of the Gospel*" (C. R. Vaughan, in the *Presbyterian Review*).

|| As Bishop Douglas has remarked (*Criterion of Miracles*, p. 543),

the existence of the Christian Church. An evanescent excitement has frequently arisen, and has spread with vast rapidity. Such was the case with Montanism in the second and third centuries,* and in the present century with Irvingism, and with the movement of the followers of Johanna Southcott, or of Mormon. That the members of these sects were as firmly persuaded of their truth as the Apostles were, that these movements were accompanied with excitement as strong, or stronger, than that which displayed itself at the first preaching of Christianity, that wonders of a certain kind were alleged to have occurred at their origin, is not denied. But how is it that they have all died out, while Christianity remains? Obviously, because in Christianity there were certain permanent truths which were of universal application; and also, because the Christian society was founded on the belief of certain facts, which those who saw them recounted to others, provision being made for the handing on of this testimony from age to age. Among the most important of these provisions was the continual reading of the narratives of the eye-witnesses of the events, or of those who had had opportunities of converse

the dissensions in the Christian Church did not result in any exposure. Judas betrayed our Lord, but he betrayed no plot in betraying Him. And he put an end to his life through remorse immediately afterwards. The murmurings of the Grecians against the Hebrews, the dissension concerning the necessity of circumcision, the quarrel of Paul with Barnabas, his difference with St. Peter, led to no discoveries prejudicial to the Christian story.

* Manicheism might be mentioned, but it is hardly a case in point. Like Mohammedanism, it derived its strength from the fact that it was a movement for reform in one of the heathen systems which had become corrupt. Its hold upon its votaries was derived from the elements of truth it had incorporated, and to its superiority to the creed it was intended to supersede. See below, p. 199.

with those eye-witnesses.* One of the earliest Christian apologists, writing before the year A.D. 161, tells us how it was the custom in his day to read the "memoirs of the Apostles" every Sunday, and to make them the subject of exhortations.† It may easily be seen how very materially this practice adds to the evidence we have for the genuineness of these writings. And it is a confirmation of the other evidence we have for their accuracy that in no other religious system, professing to have arisen in a similar manner, has this course been adopted. In the case of an ill-grounded, though enthusiastic movement, it will be easily seen what inconvenience might arise to its supporters from such a practice; how difficult it might be to satisfy the questions that might be asked, either about the documents themselves, or their contents. The fact that the Christian Church took such a course is, therefore, an additional guarantee of the truth of the contents of the Christian Scriptures. Such searching questions no doubt were often asked; and the spread of the Christian Church is no slight proof that they were satisfactorily answered.‡

* St. Luke i. 2.

† Justin Martyr, 1st Apology, Chap. lxvii.

‡ How uniform was this practice of appealing to the best procurable evidence, how entirely Christians courted the fullest inquiry, may be learned from the words of Irenæus' great treatise against heresies, written between A.D. 180 and 190. After narrating the first preaching of the Gospel, and the publication of the four Gospels, and referring to the evidence handed down to him from those who had seen and conversed with the disciples, he goes on to say that if there were any reasonable doubt on any point, the most natural course would be to resort to one of the Churches in which the Apostles themselves had taught, and inquire from them what the facts were. Irenæus "Against Heresies," Book iii., Chap. i-iv. Can anything be more unlike the conduct of those who have a lurking suspicion that it would not be well to inquire too closely into the grounds of their belief?

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7. We have another proof to add of the truth of the Gospel history. We have already adduced it in support of the miracles of Moses. And we find that the same remarkable and striking testimony to the truth of the events recorded is forthcoming in the case of Jesus Christ. We find that memorials of these events were established at the time, and have been continued ever since. In this case these memorials are two, the institution of the Holy Communion, and the commemoration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by the keeping the first day of each week as a festival in memory of it. Nor can it be contended here, as it might be possible to contend in the case of the Mosiac feasts, that their institution is lost in the darkness of the past. For the heathen writer we have before quoted, Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, refers to both these customs. He states in his report to the Emperor that the Christians of his time assembled "on a stated day," and that they bound themselves "by a sacrament" to do no evil.* That this day was Sunday we learn from the passage from Justin Martyr above cited, as also from the Acts of the Apostles themselves. And the extraordinary idea which afterwards possessed the heathen, that a child covered over with flour was slain by the neophyte, and its blood was eagerly drunk up by the rest of the community,† can only have originated in an absurd perversion of the rite of the Holy Communion, in which they who partook of the bread and wine thus solemnly blessed according to the Lord's institution, believed that they "verily and indeed"‡ partook of the Body and

* Ep. x. 97.

† Justin Martyr, Minucius Felix, Tatian, Theophilus, Tertullian, and other apologists all notice this monstrous perversion of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

‡ "Church Catechism."

Blood of Christ. We will make a few remarks upon each of these points separately.

a. The institution of Holy Communion was a perpetual memorial of the Death of Christ. Of its connection with the Passover we will say no more now than that it is a singular coincidence, to say the least, that this Jewish feast should have been instituted in the particular form it took. It is extraordinary that so many years before* a feast should have been instituted in memory of a particular deliverance, which so accurately prefigured the exact method of the deliverance wrought out by Jesus Christ. For let us once more observe that this deliverance did not consist simply in Christ's offering Himself to the Father as a Substitute in our place. It was an essential feature of the Christian system that our deliverance from sin was to be effected by the humanity of Christ being received into, and assimilated by, ourselves.† It was of this process that the eating of the Paschal Lamb at the Exodus was a type.‡

But on the connection between miracles and prophecy we shall say a word below. At present we will confine ourselves to the actual institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. That such an institution could not have been of mythical origin the remarks already made will serve to prove. No instance in history can be given of a myth growing up in such a state of society, and in so short a space of time.§ But in this case the mythic theory is absolutely

* More than 1500, if the usual date of the Exodus be the correct one.

† John vi., throughout.

‡ The whole of the sixth chapter of St. John, spoken before a Passover, inculcates this truth. Cf. Luke xxii. 15.

§ The story of William Tell is a good instance of the way in which myths are evolved. The story of the apple is a well-known Aryan legend, which is found in different forms among various nations; and meets us in the ballad of William of Cloudeslee in our own. But in

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precluded by the arrangements to which we have already referred for the transmission of the truths of the Christian revelation. It is still more absolutely precluded by the universality of the rite.* The account, then, of the institution of the Holy Communion is true, if any historical event can be said to be true. But how came the Apostles to continue this celebration? Of what was it the memorial? Of the death of their Leader. That is, if He never worked any wonders, if He never rose again from the dead, of the absolute failure of His mission, of the absolute disproof that He was what He pretended to be. Had the Apostles been impostors, this Death of Christ would have been the one thing they would have been desirous of keeping in the background,—the last thing they would ever have thought of commemorating. Whether impostors or enthusiasts, it is hardly conceivable that after this failure of their hopes they would have hit upon the expedient of commemorating

connection with the deliverance of Switzerland from her oppressors it is observed—(1) that it occurs in no contemporary narrative of the events; (2) that the first foreshadowings of the legend, but *without the story of Tell*, do not appear till a century later; (3) that the first account which contains the legend, written 150 years after the event, knows nothing of the name of the chief actor; (4) that his name occurs first in a ballad founded on the legend; (5) that it appears as veracious history for the first time 200 years and more after the events with which it is connected. And we may also remark that shrewd persons were not wanting, not more than a century after the appearance of this history, who not merely pointed out discrepancies in the story, but expressed strong and not unreasonable doubt *whether such a person as Tell ever existed*. This was as far back as the year 1607, the events having been supposed to have happened about three centuries earlier.

* “In the whole sphere of criticism there is no absurdity more uncritical than the idea that a rite which universally prevailed should have grown up accidentally and gradually, especially a rite of such marked peculiarity” (Ebrard, “Gospel History,” p. 409).

the one event which would be seized on by unbelievers as the proof that their Master was not what He represented Himself to be; the one event which was a greater stumbling-block than any other to the success of their work.* More inconceivable still is it that they should have placed the institution of such a memorial in the mouth of Jesus Himself. On the hypothesis that this death had been foreseen from the first,† that it had been foretold,‡ that it was an important portion of the work Jesus Christ had set Himself to do, that He was what He is represented to be, the All-sufficient Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, all becomes plain and intelligible. If this be not the case, at least it must be admitted that no other satisfactory hypothesis has as yet been invented. The fact that an amiable and misguided enthusiast managed to persuade himself that his death would be commemorated to the latest ages, that his disciples would believe it to be an actual communication of his body and blood to those who thus kept him in memory, is certainly an extraordinary instance, if it be one, of the power of delusions to root themselves in men's minds. It is only surpassed by another and yet more extraordinary fact still, and that is, that this singular and absolutely irrational hope should have been fulfilled, that his followers for eighteen centuries, in every part of the world, should have participated in the delusion, and manifested the utmost anxiety to spread it.

But another point must be noticed in reference to this commemoration—its wonderful power of satisfying men's minds. At the period when the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted, sacrificial systems of great extent

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

† Ephes. i. 4; 1 Peter i. 20; Rev. xiii. 8.

‡ Matt. xvi. 21, xx. 17; Mark viii. 31, etc.

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and complexity were recognized throughout the whole of the West, and over a large portion of the East.* Those sacrificial systems have entirely disappeared. To what is such disappearance owing? To the disappearance of the idea of sin with which such sacrifices were inseparably connected?† On the contrary, the idea of sin as an objective fact has assumed vaster proportions in the Christian Church than it ever assumed before. The only explanation can be the satisfaction brought to the human mind by what the Christian Church has accepted, the doctrine, namely, that the sufferer on Calvary was indeed One who by signs and wonders had proved Himself to be a Divine Being, and that His Death was the only possible and sufficient Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Nor shall we stop here. We go on to contend that the only adequate explanation of the continued existence of the Holy Communion as a memorial of Christ's Death is the fact of His Resurrection. For how otherwise should such assertions as those of Jesus Christ be believed, however confidently He made them? Were there no mighty works, no miracles, that is, it is difficult to know how claims so amazing could ever have been entertained at all. But even supposing that the blameless life and admirable teaching

* Sacrifice in the ancient world, Jewish and Gentile, is a most marked feature of the life of mankind. One of its most marked features was, (1) the ceremonial destruction of the animal, (2) the ceremonial partaking of its flesh. *What* the ancient worshipper believed these practices to typify we cannot precisely say. In the absence of any satisfactory explanation of the point, it may not be unreasonable to suppose that mankind instinctively felt the need of reconciliation to God, (1) by the offering to Him of a perfect life, and (2) by the communication to them of that life and character thus offered and accepted.

† "Buddhism rejects the notion that lay at the root of sacrifice, namely, that past sin presents any objective obstacle to man's reconciliation with God" (Maclear, "Difficulties on the Side of Unbelief," p. 8).

of Jesus of Nazareth had induced some to admit those claims, His Death, if it stood alone, would have been fatal to all belief in Him. The commemoration of that Death would have had no foundation to build upon. It might have been kept up for a few years by a constantly dwindling band of adherents in memory of one whom they had dearly loved when in life. But as the hand of death removed one by one those who had known Him, that commemoration, like many another commemoration of men honoured and admired in their day, would have slowly died out. In this instance, it is true, the memorial had for its ground the belief that He Whose memory was kept up had given Himself a Sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. But what ground was there for believing that this was so? How were men to be persuaded that this excellent man, who believed Himself to be sent by God as the promised Messiah, had really redeemed mankind by His death? Supposing the extraordinary idea had entered His head that His death was such a sacrifice, how were men to know that there was any real sacrifice at all, or that if there were, the sacrifice had been accepted? The celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the doctrine with which that celebration was connected, could only have derived their vitality from a belief in the Resurrection. It was only when the Resurrection was proclaimed that the commemoration of the Death of Christ had any rational ground to stand upon. "This Jesus, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead," are the words which contain the solution of the difficulty. Granted the great miracle of the Resurrection, granted that this was the truth which the Apostles everywhere proclaimed,* granted that they everywhere made known the fact to crowds of hearers that they had seen the Lord

* Acts iv. 33; xvii. 18, etc.

without any possibility of mistake after His Resurrection, and we can understand how the Lord's Supper came to be celebrated everywhere, and how it came to be regarded as an application to the spirit of each believer of the efficacy of the One Sacrifice which had been made—and accepted—for the sins of the whole world. Nor is this the whole explanation of the meaning of the Sacrament. It is not only the application of the Sacrifice of a dying Lord, it is the communication of the life of a living One. The whole force of the celebration consists in this,—that He Whose Sacrifice was believed to have been offered for the sins of the whole world, is supposed through the Eternal Spirit to communicate the gift of His humanity to those who believe in Him, and fulfil His Word. That this humanity is supposed to be the humanity of a living and not a dead being hardly needs demonstration. The most remarkable fact in the whole matter has yet to be added, namely, that if we have evidence for any historical fact in the whole world, it is that this view of the case was solemnly placed before mankind through this memorial by Jesus of Nazareth, the night before His Crucifixion. He knows that He is about to be crucified,—to fail utterly, that is, if the Christian view of His Person be the wrong one. And yet He does not doubt that the memorial He then established would endure, nor that men would believe that as they ate of that Bread and drank of that Cup, they would be by faith partakers of the Flesh and Blood of Him Who was so slain. We may therefore safely challenge all those who deny the reality of miracles to do what has never yet been done, namely, give a rational explanation of the origin of the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Communion throughout the Christian world, from which the miraculous shall be entirely eliminated.

(b) Into the particular evidence for the Resurrection we shall enter under our next head. But we may here dwell upon the fact that this event was itself the subject of a special memorial throughout the Christian world. The translation of the weekly day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week is a fact of the most world-wide notoriety. There is no other explanation of that fact which is or can be given than that it originated in a belief that on that day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Nor was the observance of the Lord's Day a custom which slowly grew up in the Christian society. It was among the earliest recorded of their customs. We first hear of it about twenty-five years after the event. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians,* mentions it as a day of special observation among Christians, although it is doubtful whether the "laying by" of which he speaks was to be done at home or in the congregation. But any doubt that congregations *were* gathered together on that day is removed by a reference to the Acts of the Apostles, where we find that the disciples "came together to break bread" on that day.† In the Apocalypse, which was composed some forty years later, the name "the Lord's Day" is already given to it. The custom was of universal observance. Justin Martyr, in the passage already cited,‡ tells the Emperor that the Christians were wont to assemble on "the day called Sunday," thus defining the "stated day" on which Pliny informed the Emperor that the Christians in his jurisdiction used to meet together. This establishment of a weekly festival proves at least as much as this, that within twenty-five years after the death

* 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

† Acts xx. 7. The event here referred to occurred not many months after the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written.

‡ See p. 190.

of Christ, His Resurrection was firmly believed in as a fact, and this within the life-time of many of those who affirmed that they had seen Him.* Nothing of this kind has ever happened before or since. No day has ever been set apart to commemorate the resurrection of any historical personage. We have, it is true, the well-known Festival of the Chair, observed by the adherents of Manes.† But this was the anniversary of the death of their teacher, not of his resurrection. There were many features in common between Manicheism and Christianity. The founders of each were men of blameless lives. Each taught a religion which reformed and improved upon the religious system of his country. Each inculcated the deepest purity of life upon his disciples. Each was crucified on account of his zeal and earnestness, and the opposition he excited. The followers of each were inspired with a genuine enthusiasm for truth and holiness. It is, therefore, a most remarkable fact that the followers of one commemorated the death, the other the resurrection, of their Founder. It is for the opponents of Christianity to explain how it is that the sect which confines itself to the truth has disappeared, while that which

* 1 Cor. xv. 1-4.

† “A teacher’s chair, gaily ornamented, and enveloped in costly cloths, was placed in the room where their assemblies were held, and five steps, apparently as a symbol of the five pure elements, led the way to this chair. All the Manichees testified their reverence for this chair by falling down before it to the earth, after the Oriental fashion” (Neander, “Church History,” vol. ii., sect. 4). The study of Manicheism, as compared with Christianity, is a very instructive one. The facts have never been seriously doubted or denied, although the evidence for them is infinitesimal as compared with that for Christianity. But the comparison of two religions originating at the same time and under similar circumstances, and propagated by the same means, is calculated to throw great light upon the evidence for Christianity, the older and more permanent of the two.

pins its faith to an absurdity exists still, and continues to enrol fresh adherents.

(c) We now come to the actual evidence for the Resurrection itself, that great and crowning miracle, on which depends the whole question of the miraculous element in Christianity. And in scrutinizing this evidence we find ourselves confined within very narrow limits. We have already anticipated most of what we have to say. The testimony in favour of Christianity as a whole, the admissions of antagonists, the character of the Apostles, the manner in which they set about their work, the nature of the Christian Church, the infinite opportunities given for cross-questioning in its weekly assemblies, the way in which inquiry was challenged, the course which legal investigations took, the existence of two public memorials, each of which finally depends for its observance upon the fact of the Resurrection,—every one of these singly is an argument of no slight weight in favour of the Resurrection of Christ, and combined they form a whole which cannot be lightly cast aside by any man of common honesty or rationality. The direct evidence, therefore, for the Resurrection narrows itself down to this. Either it actually took place, or the Apostles wilfully deceived mankind when they said it took place, or they fancied they saw Christ, when in point of fact they did not see Him. Let us examine into the accounts, and see which of the three is most probable. With regard to the question of imposture, it may be remarked that it has never seriously been maintained. St. Matthew tells us that a saying was “currently reported” among the Jews of his day that the Apostles had stolen the body of Christ. If this report were true, the Jewish rulers had in their hands the evidence which could have destroyed the Nazarene imposture in its infancy. The Roman soldiers

could have come forward and testified to the manner in which the theft had taken place. To put an end to a superstition which was the cause of formidable disturbances of the public peace, the Roman governor might have been easily induced to wink at the breach of discipline among his troops. But not only was the story an improbable one in itself, not only was it *most* unlikely that several Roman soldiers, specially hired to prevent a theft of this kind, should all have been asleep upon their post, but the Jewish authorities never dared to bring the matter to the test of a public inquiry. It is quite unreasonable to suppose that the statements of the disciples of Christ had been proved untrue, and that the fact had been forgotten. The rapid spread of Christianity, the alarm and indignation that spread excited, the strenuous and persevering efforts of the Jews to prevent it, would have secured the permanent publication of the results of the inquiry, if it had ever taken place. It was an intelligent, a civilized age, an age in which legal processes were respected. We repeat, *Why was this inquiry never held?* The members of the Sanhedrim were told to their faces by St. Peter and St. John * that God had raised Jesus from the dead ; St. Peter and St. John were professing to work miracles in His name,—and yet the chief priests never ventured to bring forward a tittle of evidence to expose the fraud. It is clear that they had none to produce. Their whole conduct is that of men who are utterly confounded by the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus. They might either have put the Apostles to death in the same way as their Master, or they might have treated them with contempt, as either fools or knaves, and their conduct would have been consistent and

* Acts iv,

intelligible. The middle course they actually took is strongly symptomatic of an uneasy, suppressed consciousness that what the Apostles stated was true. Their argument was not reason, but force ; and force, we know, is the last resort of a weak cause. They apprehended the Apostles, they beat them, they stoned their principal supporter, but they never took the obvious course of showing that what they so boldly asserted had never happened. And so, still, the company of believers assembled without let or hindrance in Solomon's Porch in the Temple, and propagated their imposture, without any attempt on the part of the rulers of the Jews to make public the damaging facts which they were content to whisper among themselves. Nor was there one found in their whole council rational enough to tell Gamaliel that a cause which was demonstrably founded in fraud was hardly likely to be "of God." * Granting, again, that the whole passage in Josephus about Jesus Christ is spurious, how are we to explain the extraordinary fact that this historian, minute as he usually is, has nothing whatever to say about the extraordinary imposture which took place in the time of Pontius Pilate, and which, even when he wrote, was still convulsing the world, an imposture concerning which his connection with the ruling class in Palestine would have enabled him to say a good deal ? †

* Acts v. 39.

† This argument is equally strong against the theory of delusion. Josephus's history goes down to the capture of Jerusalem, about three years after the death of St. Paul. Josephus held a command in Palestine under Vespasian. He could not have been ignorant of the existence of Christianity, when it was notorious enough at Rome to have directed Nero's persecution against it, and when Tacitus testifies to the "vast multitude" which adhered to it. One way of interpreting the silence of Josephus is that he was, as he himself declares, a Pharisee, and the Pharisees, as we know, were much less hostile to the disciples

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In point of fact, except in the subdued whispers of those who were resolved not to believe in it, the charge of imposture was never openly preferred against those who proclaimed the Resurrection of Jesus. Nor is it easy to see why, except on the hypothesis that such a charge could not be proved.

Another consideration which is incompatible with the idea of imposture is, that Christ had actually prophesied His Death and Resurrection. We have this on the authority of the very persons who made this accusation. The very ground why a watch was appointed, and seals set on the tomb, was that "that deceiver" had said that He would rise again after three days. Here two considerations naturally suggest themselves. If Jesus were a "deceiver," if He had never wrought any mighty works, if He had never shown any signs of supernatural power, surely it was enough to have slain Him. Why all this uneasiness about a prophecy ridiculous in itself? Of what use to His disciples would be the possession of His dead body? How could its possession aid them in diffusing a persuasion that He had risen from the dead? They ran the risk of being apprehended in the attempt to rifle the tomb. They ran an equal risk of being apprehended with the dead body in their possession. Was the attempt worth the risk?

of Christ than they were to Christ Himself, on account of the support the Christian Church gave to the doctrine of the Resurrection. See the narrative in the Acts, in which the Sadducees take the place of special antagonism to Christ occupied by the Pharisees in the Gospels. Josephus, too, was a man of the world, and as such would be unwilling to forfeit his position for the sake of embracing a sect which he nevertheless could not deny to have strong evidence in its favour. Gamaliel is an instance of the fact that there were many who felt themselves unable to confute the evidence for Christianity, though they could not bring themselves to an open acknowledgment of its truth.

204 *Are the Scripture Miracles Credible?*

Would the possession of the body of their deceased Teacher inspire them with boldness enough to go on asserting through evil report and good report, in the face of the most determined and relentless opposition, that He was risen, whose body they knew they had stolen, and to persevere unto death in their false and fraudulent assertion? And then this prophecy of Jesus concerning His Death and Resurrection. What was the use of it, if it were not true? Could it be contended that Jesus desired and advised His disciples beforehand to steal His body, and to spread abroad a false report that He had risen? Surely this supposition is too absurd to be credited. Or when we know that all Jews, including the disciples themselves, were possessed with a belief that their Messiah was to be a temporal prince, who should subdue all nations under the Jewish yoke, can it be supposed that they could seriously hope to carry on successfully a fraud which arrayed against it all the strongest prejudices of the Jewish people, and even their own? Under this supposition, too, why do they represent themselves as so wedded to the idea of temporal monarchy? Why do they represent themselves as still adhering to it, when, according to their account, the Resurrection was an accomplished fact? * The last thing that any man could have expected who had succeeded in abstracting the body of his hapless leader from the grave, and who held it as a pledge of failure, would have been that so desperate an expedient would be likely to succeed, and that a world, which would not listen to Jesus when alive, would be converted by the mendacious assertions of twelve men who pretended that He was risen from the dead, and hoped to support this ridiculous pretence by the futile expedient of rifling His tomb.

* Acts i, 6.

We come, then, next to the theory of enthusiastic hallucination. This has been put before the world lately in a very picturesque and striking form by the author of "*Philochristus*."* It is supposed, in this original romance, that the disciples were so penetrated with awe and reverence for their Master, and with sorrow for His premature and undeserved death, that they imagined at intervals that they saw Him once more before them and heard His voice. And yet we may put it to any reasonable person whether this mode of relating the events does not suggest more difficulties than it satisfies. Would it be possible for men under the influence of a vague and indescribable impression such as is there described to go forth and persevere till death in the assertion of the Resurrection as an actual fact?† Would the impression made have been strong enough to resist the lapse of time, the natural scepticism of the human heart, the half-suspicion of mistake, the reaction which sets in when the first excitement has spent itself? Would it have nerved the Apostles to brave the opposition which their teaching everywhere excited? Above all, would it have had power to change the timid, irresolute, unenlightened men whom Christ gathered round

* The writer of *Philochristus* has done the cause of Christianity great service. It is not until the alternative to the Christian account is put before us constructively that its weakness is perceived. That the Apostles *might* have been under a mistake in fancying they had seen Christ does duty very well for an argument, until we come to put it clearly before us how such a mistake could have been made. It is only when we have done this that we begin to feel the difficulties involved in such a supposition.

† We may compare the visions of Ignatius, related to have been seen by many of his disciples after his martyrdom, in the contemporary account which has already been cited. Yet none of these persons ventured to assert that they had seen Ignatius risen from the dead.

Him into the bold, resolute, capable, intelligent band who have transformed the face of the whole earth? Would it not have had precisely the opposite effect? For, we may remember, we cannot press the two charges of hypocrisy and enthusiasm at once. If the Apostles were sustained by exalted feeling in the wonders they narrate, we may at least trust them in the record of ordinary facts. Exalted feeling would prompt them to represent themselves as thoroughly convinced from the first of the greatness of Him whom they followed. And if they do not so represent themselves, it can only be because they are telling the truth. It is for those who reject the miraculous part of the narrative to explain those facts, to make it clear by what marvel or mystery the death of Christ inspired His disciples with a courage they had never possessed before, convinced them of that which, up to the moment of that death, they had continually doubted. And whatever explanation may be given of this singular fact, it will remain at least open to question whether the ordinary Christian explanation of the phenomenon is not intrinsically the more probable of the two.* And, therefore, we may well hesitate before we give up the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, narratives so strongly authenticated by external and internal testimony, for a supposed authentic account, evolved out of his own moral consciousness by an able and eloquent writer of the present day.†

And besides this, the facts themselves, critically considered, do not lend themselves to the theory of hallucina-

* This argument is first used by Origen against Celsus, ii., 39, 41.

† Or rather, we might say, one chosen at will, out of twenty or more such accounts. For there is no explanation of the phenomena, however plausible, which is not rejected by the next writer who undertakes to make all clear.

tion. Occasions, names, dates, are given, as we have seen. If we set aside the Four Gospels, we have a letter written within twenty-five years of the alleged occurrence,—a letter whose genuineness is not seriously disputed, which gives all particulars of the occasions on which the risen Lord was seen. “Jesus rose the third day;” He was “seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that He was seen of *above five hundred brethren at once*, of whom *the greater part remain unto this present*, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James, then of all the Apostles; and last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”* Such is the account given by St. Paul, who had had excellent

* 1 Cor. xv. 4-8. Mr. Froude, in his “Short Studies on Great Subjects,” i. 218, 219, describes St. Paul as a “fiery fanatic,” smitten with sunstroke, and fancying He saw Jesus Christ. He complains that St. Paul did not “at once seek for those who could best have told him the details of the truth,” but retired into Arabia. We may suspect that St. Paul had already learned all they had to tell him, and that the real source of his fury was not that he “disbelieved fiercely and passionately” the report of our Lord’s Resurrection, but that he was incapable of answering or disproving the story of the Apostles, and had an unpleasant misgiving that it might be true. The vision was “confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ” of that story; and he retired into Arabia in order to understand how the fact, which he no longer doubted, could be reconciled with those Scriptures to which Jew and Christian alike appealed. Mr. Froude says that “he rather held aloof from those who had been our Lord’s companions”; and then proceeds, not very consistently, to remark that “he saw Peter, he saw James!” If “other of the Apostles he saw none,” there is great reason to suppose that they were not at Jerusalem at the time. And Mr. Froude concludes with the remarkable statement that it was to “the vision he himself had seen” to which “he always referred when called on for a defence of his faith.” One would think that Mr. Froude had never happened to light on the passage which stands at the head of this note. But in writings against Christianity the last thing usually required is a thorough acquaintance with the subject.

opportunities of knowing the truth. He had been a most vehement antagonist of Christianity. He had persecuted to the death those who believed in it. But he had never been able to prove that Christ's Resurrection was a fiction; and his opposition was changed into conviction by the sight of the Risen Lord, who had chosen him, in consequence of his iron resolution and straightforward integrity, to carry the tidings of the Resurrection to the Gentiles. From this time he had ample opportunity of inquiring into the truth of Christianity. He went to Jerusalem; he saw Peter and James. If he saw none other of the Apostles, he saw and conversed with many who had seen Christ in the flesh, and not improbably with some of the five hundred who had seen Him after the Resurrection, since he seems to know them well. And then, not eight years before the letter was written which has just been quoted, St. Paul had visited Jerusalem, and engaged in long and earnest conference with the Apostles and elders concerning matters affecting the welfare of the Church.

We place this account of the Resurrection of Christ first, not because it is the earliest,* but because, however futile the objections brought against the genuineness of the Gospels, this Epistle to the Corinthians holds a still more unassailable position, because it could not possibly have been written under any other circumstances than those under which it professes to be written. But the Gospels take a course precisely similar. There is no attempt to evade the real issue by vague generalities. The occasions and circumstances on which Jesus was seen after His Resurrection are clearly stated. The various accounts may not always be easily harmonized. But the statement of St. Paul leads to the notion that the

* See above, p. 170

appearances were many in number; and there can be no doubt that each writer selects a few from among many. The actual occasions, however, are clearly specified. There was an appearance of angels to the women at the tomb.* There was an appearance of Jesus Himself to Mary Magdalene.† There was an appearance to the Apostles on their return from the empty sepulchre. Names of persons are given, as Mary Magdalene, Cleopas,‡ Peter. Places are specified, as on the road to Emmaus.§ On two occasions Jesus appeared to His disciples when assembled at Jerusalem.|| On the second occasion an Apostle was present who had previously refused to credit the intelligence given him by his fellows. But he could not resist the evidence of his own senses.¶ So far, in fact, from the story of the resurrection being greedily swallowed, even by those who would most have desired to believe it, we find doubt very freely expressed among the disciples themselves.** All four Evangelists testify to this fact; and thus we learn that from the very first the reported miracle had to undergo the ordeal of criticism. This fact is not very easily reconcilable with the theory of unreasoning enthusiasm which is so readily supposed to account for the spread of Christianity. But yet more convincing proofs were given that the Resurrection was no delusion. On two occasions Christ partook of food.†† He allowed Himself to be touched by His disciples.‡‡ He

* Matt. xxviii. 2-8; Mark xvi. 5-8; John xx. 12.

† John xx. 14-17.

‡ Luke xxiv. 18.

§ Luke xxiv. 13.

|| Luke xxiv. 36-48; John xx. 19-29.

¶ John xx. 28.

** Matt. xxviii. 17; Mark xvi. 11, 13; Luke xxiv. 11, 21-24.

†† Luke xxiv. 42, 43; John xxi. 13. Cf. Acts x. 41.

‡‡ Matt. xxviii. 9; Luke xxiv. 39; John xx. 20, 27.

told them to meet Him in Galilee.* To Galilee, therefore, they repaired, and there they saw Him more than once.† Now these are not the utterances of unreasoning enthusiasm. They are practical, common sense assertions, declarations of rational men. And as such they are incapable of being explained away on any theory of excitement or hallucination. How stubborn they are may be seen by the fact to which reference has been already made, that the opponents of Christianity have been forced, against the whole weight of evidence, to deny the contemporary origin of the Gospels, and to assign them to a later period. No doubt it is hard to believe so extraordinary a story. No doubt it is harder still because no such facts occur in our ordinary experience. But still it is only fair to remember that in order to disbelieve that story, men are compelled to set aside all the common rules of historical evidence. They are compelled to introduce a new series of historical tests for the occasion, tests which, if applied to any other event in history, would be fatal to our belief in it. Thus then, in order to disbelieve Christianity, we are to invent rules of evidence which, if extended further, would make all history impossible. Of course we are at liberty to take such a course if we please; but at least let us clearly see what we are doing. Let us understand that by the ordinary rules of historical evidence the Resurrection and miracles of Christ are established facts—facts which rest upon a stronger basis of evidence than any others we can mention. If after perceiving this we still resolve to reject them, let it be distinctly understood that we do so in the face of evidence sufficient to establish any other facts than these. It is not because they are propounded to us on insufficient evidence—it is

* Matt. xxviii. 10.

† Matt. xxviii. 16, 17; John xxi.

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because we will not believe them on any evidence whatever. In other words, we come to the canon of Hume, as re-stated by Mill.* The whole argument revolves in a circle. No amount of evidence will convince a man who is not willing to believe.

* See above, p. 12.

CHAPTER XII.

*HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH FALSE OR SUPPOSED
MIRACLES FROM TRUE ONES?*

WE have now gone through the evidence on which the credibility of the Scripture miracles is established. We propose in this chapter to discuss certain objections to the sufficiency of the arguments whereby it has been sought to establish them.

I. M. Rénan has propounded a test of his own, which he thinks ought to be satisfied, before we admit that a miracle has been worked. "Let a worker of miracles," he says, "come forward to-morrow with pretensions serious enough to deserve examination. Let us suppose him to announce that he is able to restore a dead man to life. What would be done? A committee would be appointed, composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists, and persons accustomed to exact investigation; a body would then be selected which the committee would assure itself was already dead, and a place would be chosen where the experiment was to take place. Every precaution would be taken to leave no opening for uncertainty, and if, under those conditions, the restoration to life were effected, a probability would be arrived at which would be almost equal to certainty. An experiment, however, should always admit of being

repeated. What a man has done once he should be able to do again; and in miracles there can be no question of ease or difficulty. The performer would be requested to repeat the operation under other circumstances upon other bodies. But who does not perceive that no miracle was ever performed under such conditions as these?"* No, nor ever would be, we may reply. This passage, which is quoted by Mr. Froude,† is a remarkable instance of deficient sense of humour in a nation so vivacious as the French. There is something irresistibly ludicrous in the somewhat priggish self-sufficiency of the *savant* here. Is it possible to suppose, for instance, a prophet with a solemn mission like Moses, performing his miracles before a select committee of Egyptian magicians and politicians, and being requested to repeat them as often as might be desired? The absolute absurdity of the supposition that the Creator of the world would Himself condescend thus to satisfy the requirements of a scientific *coterie* need not be demonstrated. M. Rénan seems utterly to have forgotten *Who* it is that Jesus Christ claims to be. But perhaps a few words may be necessary to point out the error into which he has fallen. The object of miracles is not scientific, but moral. They were not worked as an experiment; not to satisfy the spirit of inquiry, not to discover hidden laws of nature as a basis for future scientific progress, but to influence man's conduct. It may be remarked, that Jesus Christ never worked miracles to satisfy man's curiosity. When asked for a sign, He steadfastly declined to give it. There was always some sort of connection between the miracle and the bodily, moral, or spiritual condition of the person for whom it was worked. It has even been made an objection to His

* Rénan, "Life of Christ," Introduction.

† "Short Studies on Great Subjects," I., 222, 223.

miracles, that He "could not do" them, except where men believed in Him.

II. It is generally supposed that the defender of the Scripture miracles is compelled by the overwhelming evidence against them to reject all miraculous occurrences which are not recorded in the canon of Scripture. Mr. Froude says of the miracles of the Roman calendar: "The Protestant Christian rejects every one of them,—rejects them without inquiry—involves those for which there is good authority and those for which there is none or little, in one absolute, contemptuous, and sweeping denial. The Protestant Christian feels it more likely, in the words of Hume, that men should deceive or be deceived, than that the laws of nature should be violated." * This statement, like most rhetorical utterances, is somewhat wide of the truth. The "Protestant Christian," if this be the correct term whereby to denote all Christians who are not Romanists, might reasonably deny all these miracles on the ground that, though they are vouched for by testimony, it is testimony of a much weaker kind than the miracles of

* Mr. Froude's is an old objection. We find it thus stated in the able "Criterion of Miracles," published by Bishop Douglas of Salisbury, in 1754:—"The Protestant Christian thinks himself obliged, from all the principles of reason, to believe that evidence true which is brought to support the Gospel miracles, but is at liberty, he thinks, from the same principles of reason, to doubt or disbelieve the miracles ascribed to the Pagans of old, or to the Papists of later times, or indeed, to any other person since the publication of the Gospel" ("Collected Works," p. 386). The whole treatise is a luminous exposition of the Christian view of miracles. It contains, by anticipation, a complete refutation of such theories as Mr. Froude's, and deserves to be more widely known. The writer of these pages did not meet with it until the present chapter was written, and he finds much that is here urged anticipated, with great force, by the Bishop.

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Scripture can invoke in their favour. They are worked, not on behalf of unpopular doctrines opposed alike to numbers and authority, but on behalf of an institution which condemns investigation, and has the *prestige* of long prescription. They are devoid of the element of publicity which the Scripture miracles can claim. They are not involved inextricably with great historical events as the Scripture miracles are. No public memorials of their occurrence have been established and maintained. No body of men has been called into existence from the moment they happened, to proclaim them and invite inquiry into them. And no body of men have staked their happiness and their lives upon the fact that they have happened. On these grounds the "Protestant Christian" might reject them. But he does not. He is willing to believe any miracle which is established upon sufficient testimony. So much is this the case that many "Protestant Christians" have accepted the miracles of the sub-Apostolic age. For there appears reason to believe that the Apostolic gift of miracles died out by degrees.* It does not appear unlikely that it may have revived to a certain extent in moments of religious fervour. St. Augustine testifies to miracles worked within his knowledge, and St. Augustine is neither a superstitious nor an unreasoning witness.† The way in which St. Bernard alludes to

* Irenæus asserts this plainly in his "Treatise against Heretics," ii, 31, 32, written before A.D. 200.

† "De Civitate Dei," Chap. xxii., 22. Even if we admit that St. Augustine exaggerated the number and character of the miracles (he asserts that three were resurrections from the dead), it seems reasonable to suppose that there might be some substratum of truth in the story he tells of men speaking after their tongues were torn out by the roots. Victor Vitensis and Æneas of Gaza, the latter a Platonic philosopher, attest, by personal inspection, the fact of men speaking articulately after

miracles worked by himself is, on the whole, corroborative of the supposition that such miracles were really worked.* And so, to come down to a far later period, when we find the miracles alleged upon very competent testimony to have been worked at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, we are not necessarily called upon to reject them. Neither are we bound to involve in the same "absolute, contemptuous, sweeping denial" the miracles imputed to the Curé d'Ars, or Sister Emmerich, or Anna Maria Taigi, antecedent to all examination whatsoever.† In the case of the miracles at

their tongues had been torn out by the roots. This fact is thus treated by Gibbon ("Decline and Fall," iv. 337): "The stubborn mind of an infidel is guarded by secret, incurable suspicion; and the Arian, or Socinian, who has seriously rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, will not be shaken by the most plausible evidence of an Athanasian miracle." In this case, however, the fact, so plainly attested, may be accounted for by natural causes. See Milman, "Latin Christianity," i. 478. This may at least serve to show the folly of refusing to believe a fact related upon sufficient testimony.

* "Life of St. Bernard," by Morison, p. 62.

† These have been sometimes brought forward as analogous cases to the Scripture miracles, but apparently those who cite them have no knowledge of these persons beyond their names. Sister Emmerich worked no miracles. She is only said to have borne the impress of our Lord's Cross and wounds in a remarkable way, like Louise Lateau, and to have seen some very extraordinary visions. Anna Maria Taigi worked no miracles during her life. We are only told of some extraordinary cures wrought in consequence of imploring her intercession after her death. Of only one of these is an authentication given, by a Canon of the Roman Catholic Church in Malta. But we are not told the nature of the malady, beyond the fact that it produced lameness in one of the legs, and that the efforts of the physicians were in vain. For the case to have been analogous to that of the Christian miracles, it would have been necessary that the Canon in question should have been apprehended, tried, and executed by the British Government in consequence of such pretensions, and that a number of persons professing to be eye-witnesses

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the tomb of the Abbé Paris, one of the principal conditions which we have laid down is fulfilled. They were worked in the face of a strongly hostile authority. If the Jesuits, who at that time ruled the Court and the Church, could have suppressed or exposed these miracles, they would have done so. They, therefore, in their character, stand entirely apart from any other of the very best attested miracles which can be brought forward in argument, with the exception, as we have seen, of the miracles of Scripture. But even with this admission, we may venture to remark that such miracles do not prove much. The cures worked at the tomb of the Abbé Paris (and this is more emphatically true of those attributed to the other persons we have named) were all of them such as might have been produced by excited feeling. That such results *do* follow excited feeling we have already seen. The case of the miracle at Knock, and the reaction consequent upon so strong a tension of the nervous system, has been already referred to.* And the cures at the tomb of the Abbé Paris were many of them temporary.† It may at once be admitted that had our

of the facts to which he testified should have continued for years in Malta and elsewhere, declaring incessantly, in spite of all opposition and ill-treatment, that what had been asserted was true. Few rational persons, under such circumstances, would refuse their assent to the fact that the miracle must have taken place. The miracles wrought at the instance of the Curé d' Ars were usually wrought, if wrought at all, not by him, but by prayer to St. Philomena. It must be admitted that some of them are satisfactorily attested. But they are usually cures of nervous and hysterical affections. The same may be said of M. M. Alacoque and other Roman Catholic saints.

* Above, p. 56.

† Bishop Douglas, writing about thirty years after the event, shows that many of these persons were not so ill as they pretended to be, that some who pretended to be cured were not cured, and that all were cases within the reach of enthusiasm. But the most striking feature of

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Lord confined Himself simply to the cure of ordinary diseases, and such diseases as depend in any way upon the condition of the nervous system, His miracles would have been capable of explanation from natural causes. Even such cases as recovery from lameness or deafness, or the cure of a fever, or even the healing of persons under the influence of demoniacal possession, might be thus explained. But the stilling of the tempest, the turning water into wine, the feeding the four and five thousand, the permission given to the devils to enter the swine, the raising of the dead, do not admit of such an explanation. Even were we to grant that the cases of Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain were attributable to a false impression, the case of Lazarus remains behind. And if we were to surrender that, it would only remove the difficulty of the assailants of miracle a step further. They would still have to deal with the Resurrection of Christ. Consequently, even were we to admit—and we are neither concerned to affirm nor deny—many of the

his argument is the fact which he remarks on, that *only a few selected cases* were cured. An Abbé with one leg shorter than the other came daily and leaped on the Abbé Paris's tomb. He imagined that the leg grew a little shorter before the tomb was walled up. But it was reckoned that had he leaped on the tomb daily, it would have taken seventy-two years for the cure to have been completed, at the rate at which he supposed it to have progressed. The cures wrought at the instance of Anna Maria Taigi and the Curé d'Ars are of a similar description. If any one who chooses may be cured by keeping a *neuvaine* to St. Philomena, the wonder is that any remain unwell. Bishop Douglas relates, moreover, some remarkable instances of touching for the king's evil. "I myself," he says, "have met with a man who assured me that Queen Anne's touch and the medal she hung about his neck (and which I saw about it above twenty years after) had cured him in a most extraordinary way." ("Criterion of Miracles," p. 479). Another case was that of a woman, who, after she had been cured, and in spite of warnings that the per-

stories of mediæval and modern miracles, we should still be able to contend that the miracles of Scripture stand upon an altogether different basis, and lead to an altogether different conclusion. And were we even to concede—though we see no reason for doing so—that these alleged miracles could not be explained on the theory of physical excitement, we might still contend that the spirit of holiness is the Spirit of Jesus Christ; that men of conspicuous holiness must possess an exceptional portion of that Spirit; and that he upon whom the Spirit of Christ has been poured in unusual measure might not unreasonably be supposed to possess some of those exceptional qualifications which it is—on the Christian theory at least—in the power of that Spirit to grant.

III. But with regard to most mediæval and other miracles, the testimony on which they depend is of far inferior kind.*

manence of the cure depended on her wearing the medal, sold it. The disease broke out again, she was again touched by royalty, and the disease was *again cured*. The surgeon to Queen Anne is the authority for this case. Again, Bishop Douglas mentions the case of Mr. Greatrake, an Irish gentleman, who felt inwardly impelled to touch for the king's evil, and whose extraordinary cures are attested by physicians, divines of repute, and gentlemen of position, whose names are given. Among them are Dr. Rust, Dean of Connor, and afterwards Bishop of Dromore; Dr. Patrick, afterwards Bishop of Ely; and two distinguished members of my own college, Dr. Whichcote and Dr. Cudworth, author of "*The Intellectual System*," the latter of whom attests the cure of his own son. *Ibid.*, p. 482. Physicians, from Hippocrates downwards, have shown the power of emotions, especially joy, over diseases of a hysterical or nervous, and even of a feverish, aguish, or gouty tendency. And beside, many of these cures were partial or temporary. Had our Lord's miracles been simply of this character, they would have been more easy to set aside. See last page.

* The reader will find this train of argument followed out in Paley's "*Evidences*," Prop. ii., Chap. i.

Most of them, as we have seen, are propounded to us on evidence which it is impossible to sift,—the evidence of interested witnesses, who would not suffer themselves to be cross-examined.* But very frequently the evidence is weaker still. The miracles of Apollonius Tyaneus, to which reference has already been made, are handed down to us on the authority of a work by Philostratus, written one hundred years after the events narrated,—at a time, therefore, when any inquiry into them was manifestly impossible.† The wonders ascribed to Dominic and Francis, again, do not appear in their earliest biographies. They grew up as the friars found it necessary to obtain influence with a credulous and ignorant populace. The early biography of Ignatius Loyola, written by Ribadaneira, fifteen years after his death, expressly disclaims the miracles which have since been attributed to him, and takes the trouble to explain how it was he did not work them.‡ Again, the

* Of such miracles as were mentioned above, p. 127, there would seem to be no proof whatever, save the unsupported assertions of those who record them. No examination seems to have been attempted of any one of these occurrences when it happened, or any opportunity given for the investigation of the statements when made.

† And not only this, but, as Bishop Douglas reminds us, the work of Philostratus is, by his own confession, compiled only from common report, and from an account given him by Julia, wife of the Emperor Severus, of a treatise *said* to have been written by one Damis, a companion of Philostratus, but *never published*. And not only does Philostratus ascribe to his hero acts obviously travestied from the Gospels, but he sets aside an earlier work composed by Mœragenes, for the simple reason that it describes Apollonius as a magician and a juggler. “Criterion of Miracles,” p. 420. See also Origen against Celsus, iv. 41, who mentions this book of Mœragenes. Philostratus’ book seems to bear about the same relation to the Gospels that Virgil’s “Æneid” does to the “Iliad.”

‡ Archbishop Trench, following Tholuck, uses this argument (“Notes

accounts of the miracles of St. Francis Xavier were published in Europe, though, if they happened at all, they happened in India, then by no means as accessible from Europe as India is now.* Nothing could be more different than the case of the Christian miracles, in which the accounts published were either published in Palestine itself, as the Gospel of St. Matthew, or in places whence Palestine was easy of access, as the rest of the Christian Scriptures. And be it remembered that the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire rendered intelligence from Palestine more easily obtainable than from any other province of the Roman Empire.

And yet once more. Most of the alleged miraculous cures which have been brought forward to shake the credit of the Scripture miracles depend entirely upon the unsupported assertion of a single person; and that person, one who attempted no inquiry into the circumstances of the case he reports.† Thus Hume, beside the miracles at the

on the Miracles," p. 49), but it may be traced to Bayle's Dictionary. Forty years afterwards Ribadaneira (who had brought out a second edition in 1587) introduces miracles into his history, stating that he had *never previously heard of them*, but that now he had fallen in with many publicly related, and supported by weighty and fitting testimony. Bishop Douglas remarks that the reason why miracles appear in these biographies is because miracles are expected of Romish saints, and each biographer considers it a point of honour that the particular saint whose virtues he is commemorating should not fall behind the rest. "Criterion of Miracles," p. 425.

* See "Criterion of Miracles," p. 424; Paley, "Evidences," Prop. ii., Chap. i.; Archbishop Trench, "Notes on the Miracles," p. 51.

† One attempt has been made at propagating a false report of a resurrection. It was made by the so-called "French prophets" in the last century, who gained great reputation by their cure of Sir Robert Bulkeley. Bishop Douglas refers to this case. But perhaps its best refutation is contained in a pithy remark by Bishop Sherlock, in his

tomb of the Abbé Paris, which we have already discussed, brings forward two instances in which miracles have been reported to us by eye-witnesses. These, to quote the telling rejoinder of Paley, "we are entitled to regard as the strongest which the history of the world could supply to the inquiries of a very acute and learned adversary." Let us examine them. Tacitus, a contemporary, relates that Vespasian was urged to anoint with his spittle* the eyeballs of a man with diseased eyes, and to touch with his foot a man with a diseased hand. After much persuasion, he did so; and in each case cures were effected.† Tacitus relates this history twenty-seven years after the event. But Paley, who discusses this question, does not find it necessary to deny the accuracy of his testimony. He only points out the absence of any proof that the disease was not simulated, or that the whole matter was not concerted between the priests of Serapis, in whose honour the miracles was wrought, the patient, and perhaps the Emperor himself. It will be observed that two of our tests of the reality of miracles are absent from this case. It was worked in support of an established religious

"Tryal of the Witnesses," p. 13 (original edition). 'Mr. A. : "Why might not the same thing happen at Jerusalem which happened but a few years ago in our own country? Matthew and John, and the rest of them, managed that affair with more dexterity than the French prophets; so that the resurrection of Jesus gained credit in the world, and the French prophets sunk under their ridiculous pretensions. That's all the difference." Mr. B. : "Is it so? And a very wide difference, I promise you."'

* We may easily discern whence this idea had originated. It is an independent testimony to the genuineness of the accounts of the Christian miracles.

† See Paley's "Evidences," Prop. ii., Chap. ii. Also Bishop Douglas examines the story in his "Criterion of Miracles."

system,* and no inquiry was possible into the merits of the case. The second story is even more absolutely futile. Cardinal de Retz, we are told, was shown by the canons of Saragossa, a man, who "had been several years at the gate with one leg only." "I saw him," continues the Cardinal, "with two." The Cardinal says no more. Whether the canons of Saragossa were persons on whose veracity we might depend, we do not know. They certainly did not put their veracity to the test as the Apostles did, by going about and proclaiming the miracle at the risk of their lives. The Cardinal made no inquiry. The leg might have been an artificial one. In fact, Hume's argument might not unfairly be represented thus; because Cardinal de Retz has told a foolish story, therefore the miracles of the New Testament ought not to be believed.†

IV. It is sometimes objected to the Scripture miracles that they do not occupy so prominent a place in the early Christian apologies as they might be expected to have done, and that this fact justifies a suspicion that they were not really wrought. That the early apologists knew that they

* If the Divine honours then paid to Emperors can be called religious.

† See the refutation of this story by Paley in the chapter cited above. Bishop Douglas lays down the following criteria for discerning false miracles from true. "Firstly, we suspect miracles to be false when the accounts are not published to the world till long after the time when they are said to have been performed. Secondly, we suspect them to be false when the accounts are not published in the place where it is pretended they were performed, but are propagated only at a great distance from the supposed scene of action. Thirdly, supposing the accounts to have the two foregoing qualifications, we may still suspect them to be false, if, in the time when, and at the place where, they took their rise, the circumstances were such that they might be suffered to pass without examination" ("Criterion of Miracles," pp. 407-8). We have already (Chap. x.) laid down similar canons,

were wrought, and that Jesus thus called attention to His claims to be regarded as the Son of God, does not admit of question.* The reason why they do not occupy so prominent a position in the evidential writings of the first ages of Christianity is, because they were attributed to magic.† That is to say, the fact of their having occurred was admitted, but their origin was challenged. In those days the existence of the supernatural was not denied. But men believed in evil agencies as well as good. Before, therefore, the claim of Jesus Christ to be the Son of God could be regarded as authenticated by miracles, a preliminary inquiry was necessary as to the nature of the power by which He worked them.‡ If that power were recognized as one which tended to goodness and virtue, then a Divine character might be supposed to attach to the worker. Consequently, antecedent to the admission of Christ's claim to be regarded as the Son of God by reason of the wonders which He worked, men inquired into His life and teaching. And, inasmuch as both were blameless, inasmuch as they were manifestly opposed to any evil influences whatever, the result of this inquiry usually decided the question. The miracles were not disputed; the goodness and virtue of the worker and His doctrine were established. The natural consequence was to acknowledge Him as the Son of God. And this argu-

* Justin Martyr, "First Apology," Chaps. xxxi., xlvi., xlviii. "Clementine Recognitions," Chap. i. 6.

† Justin Martyr, "First Apology," Chap. xxx. "But lest any one should meet us with the question, What should prevent Him whom we call Christ from performing His mighty works by magical arts, and by this appearing to be the Son of God, we will now offer proof."

‡ "The character of any supernatural power can only be judged by the moral character of the statements that it contains. Thus only can we tell whether it be a revelation from God or the Devil" (Dr. Arnold, "Letter to Dr. Hawkins, in Life II., 26).

ment was strengthened by the nature of the works themselves. Uniformly beneficent in their nature, they could not have been wrought by a compact with the powers of evil. And thus, by power and goodness alike, it was admitted that Jesus Christ had "manifested Himself to be the Son of God."

V. An attempt has been made to invalidate the force of this reasoning of late, by alleging that Christianity, in point of fact, does not make for goodness. It is the most wicked of all religions, said the elder Mill.* But he identified it with a doctrine relating to the damnation of the greater part of the human race which forms no part of the Christian revelation, and is nowhere asserted in the Scriptures.† "It is responsible for all the furious persecutions, the massacres, the burnings, which have been carried on in the name of the Christian Church." Not in the least. Such actions are contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ, and in direct defiance both of His precept and His example. Human nature, we know, retained its corruption, even after admission into the Christian Church.‡ That corruption seized upon the cause of Christianity as a pretext, and wrought the very evil against which Christianity was a protest. These cruelties were the work, not of the Spirit of Christ, but of the spirit of evil still inherent in humanity, which made an unjust use of His name. Satan, we are told, can put on the form of an angel of light.§ He never made a more dexterous use of the power, than when he contrived to identify cruelty and slaughter with the cause

* J. S. Mill, "Autobiography," p. 41.

† It is rather a strong process to extract it from a proverb like "Many are called, but few chosen."

‡ "This infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are regenerated" (Article IX. of the Church of England).

§ 2 Cor. xi. 14.

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of Christ. It may not, in these days, be necessary to prove that Christ's miracles were not the result of a compact with the powers of darkness. But if Christianity be not in truth a religion which makes for goodness, the Divine origin of the miracles is disproved. Though the moral influence of Christianity is a separate subject, yet it demands some notice here. Christianity has changed the face of the world. It has given man an ideal of purity such as he never before possessed. It has produced a civilization which is not linked with corruption. It has been the parent of law, order, liberty, and progress. It has cast off the corruptions which once encompassed it, while it was engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with human depravity. It is appearing now to mankind in somewhat of its native purity. And it may safely point back to Apostolic days and ask whether aught but holiness and harmlessness and brotherly love formed part, either of its doctrine or its practice. And thus we may see that the argument that miracles were plainly wrought on behalf of a scheme of Divine origin has lost none of its force. Only we have better proof of its Divine origin than men had in earlier times, and therefore have the less need of the miracles to convince us, than men had in those days. If we need proofs from whence Christianity proceeded, and by Whom the mighty works which accompanied its origin were wrought, we require no miracles at the present day; we can point to the mighty works the Christian religion has wrought. Christianity still remains without a rival in purifying the heart, affections, aims, in stirring up mankind to all self-denying, noble, beneficent acts. False miracles have been pretended for the benefit of the worker, or of those who asserted them to have taken place. The true are wrought for the benefit of the race.

VI. We may here enter upon the consideration of two miracles related, or apparently related, in Holy Writ, which have given rise to a considerable amount of controversy and doubt. These are the standing still of the sun at the command of Joshua,* and the return of the sun ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz.† These are the only miracles related in Scripture which would involve any large disturbance of the forces of nature. We have already seen‡ that these two miracles have been used to cast discredit upon all miracles, as though the tremendous dislocation of the whole system of the universe, which is necessarily involved in them, must equally have taken place in all the other Scripture miracles. This, as we have seen, is not the case; they are miracles of a peculiar character, and we propose to examine them upon their merits. And here we may remark that the evidence for them is of a different kind to that of the miracles for which we have been contending. They are mere isolated prodigies. They may be dissociated from the history without in the least degree interfering with it. No great national memorials were instituted to commemorate them. No chain of testimony in their favour has descended from their time to ours. No great revelation of the Divine Will is inextricably bound up with them. Not that for a sufficient purpose such miracles could not have been wrought. Not that even the large scale—to our eyes—in which forces regularly at work must be suspended, in order to produce such results, were not as easy a work in the Hands of Omnipotence as the stoppage of a mighty engine is by the will of the engineer. After all, it is but the sudden stoppage of the

* Josh. x. 12-14.

† 2 Kings xx. 35-37; 2 Chron. xxxii. 21.

‡ p. 49.

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earth's rotation, and the suspension or counteracting of the centrifugal force which such stoppage would generate, that would be necessary in such a case. And, antecedently to experience, it would seem far more improbable that a puny being like man could bring to a stand in a few moments the huge mechanism that he has contrived, than that the Creator of the universe could stop the rotation of one of its tiniest stars without any alarming effects. Still we are bound to admit that the stoppage of the rotation of the earth is an unusual event, and that it is reasonable to ask on what evidence it is believed to have taken place. It is moreover not irrelevant to point out that the causes of these miracles, confessedly on a grander scale than any of the others, are hardly such as we should have expected. The economy of the solar system has never, so far as we know, been interfered with by a beneficent Deity for the benefit of mankind. It may reasonably be asked whether it is probable that He would suspend it only for the slaughter of His creatures, or in order to assuage a pious monarch's solicitude about his approaching death. It will be necessary, therefore, to take a glance at the evidence in each case, and to see how far the apologist for miracles is pledged to defend those to which exception has thus been taken.

As regards the miracle of the sun's standing still at the command of Joshua, we may observe that the account is a citation from a book called the Book of Jasher. This book, according to many authorities,* is a book of national songs. It is cited in 2 Sam. i. 18, which would lead us to suppose that it was not written until that time. The order of the narrative, moreover, in Joshua x. has evidently been interrupted at this point. Joshua x. 15, as it stands, is

* As the German commentators Maurer and Keil.

clearly irreconcilable with x. 43. The obvious inference is that the narrative has been interfered with here, and an extract from some other account of the events added. Such instances are to be found in 1 Sam. xvii. and xviii., and in the Book of Jeremiah, where the present Hebrew text differs considerably from that of the early Greek translation. The Book of Joshua, as a whole, may be shown, from internal evidence, to have been composed not long after the events recorded. There seems a very high probability that at a later period some scribe, probably the composer of one of the later books, added the quotation from another ancient history, the Book of Jasher. This view is strengthened by the fact, of which every Hebrew student is aware,—that the command given to the sun and moon to stand still is in poetry, not in prose. Thus, then, we have before us a quotation from a poetical book of later date than the rest of the Book of Joshua. We next ask, What does this quotation amount to? It has been interpreted by the commentators to mean that the sun stood still in heaven for a period variously explained as twelve, or twenty-four, or thirty-six, or even forty-eight hours. But the history says nothing of the sort; and it is to the actual words of the history itself that we must look, and not to any interpretation which has been placed upon it by divines. What, then, does the history say? Literally translated from the Hebrew, the words are, “Then spake Joshua to * Jehovah in the day when Jehovah gave the Amorite before the face of the sons of Israel. And he said before the eyes of Israel, Sun, in Gibeon be still; and, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun was still; and the moon stood till a nation was avenged of its enemies. Is not this written in the Book of Jasher? And the sun stood in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go

* Some commentators render “before Jehovah.”

down like a perfect day. And there was not a day like that before or after it,—for Jehovah to hearken to the voice of a man, for Jehovah fought for Israel.” It is by no means clear what is meant by this. Many commentators hold that it simply means that the sun did not set until the triumph of Joshua was complete; and that the moon, clear and bright as it ever is in an Eastern sky, helped him to continue his pursuit beyond the valley of Ajalon, which was in the direct line of flight of the fugitives.* And if anything more is meant, it is strange that there is no corroborative evidence of the miracle, such as we have of those of Moses. Great and unapproached as the marvel was, if the usual view of it be correct, we have no mention of it † among the many catalogues of the mighty works of God, save a doubtful allusion in Habakkuk iii., until the time of the son of Sirach.‡ While, therefore, we contend that such a miracle was *possible*, we are willing to admit that it rests upon far less decisive evidence than most of those in Holy Writ, and that it may possibly be a fabric built altogether upon a misconception of the passage in the Book of Joshua.§

In the narrative of the return of the sun upon the dial

* Thus the Jewish mediæval commentator, Maimonides, interprets the words, of a day as long as the longest day in summer.

† As Hengstenberg remarks, “Geschichte des Reiches Gottes,” p. 231. Keil shows that Isa. xxviii. 21 refers to David’s defeats of the Philistines.

‡ Ecclus. xlvi. 4, “Did not the sun go back by his means, and was not one day as long as two?”

§ Mr. Warington, in his able essay, “Can we believe in Miracles?” supposes that prolonged darkness, not light, was what Joshua required. But he refers to the enigmatic language in the Hebrew, and agrees that it is by no means certain from the expressions used that any disturbance of the order of nature took place on that occasion.

of Ahaz, the case is not quite the same. Like the miracle ascribed to Joshua, it is not sustained by evidence of the same kind as those related to have been worked by Moses. It can be detached from the history without disturbing it. But on the other hand, there is no question of the meaning of the passage. The fact of the return of the sun upon the dial at Isaiah's prediction is clearly stated. The whole question therefore depends on the view we take of the inspiration of Scripture.* If we believe that the whole Scripture narrative is divinely inspired in such sort as that no mistake upon the slightest point is possible, we shall be bound to believe that the miracle occurred, nor is there any absurdity in so doing. If, on the other hand, our view of the inspiration of Scripture only binds us to accept the general accuracy of the narrative, and the general soundness of the principles therein involved, then, though we are equally bound to a general defence of the miraculous, we do not stand pledged to a belief in every miracle which is related there. The possibility of later interpolation of particular passages is becoming more and more clearly acknowledged as the science of textual criticism advances, though that same textual criticism tends to establish the *general* authenticity of the text. We are on more hazardous ground when we begin to contend that the writers of the Old and New Testament wrote under the influence of impressions prevalent in their day. But even if this concession be made, the evidence for miracles having occurred remains unanswerable. No subjective beliefs of those who attest them can explain *all* the phenomena. A lax view of inspiration may remove many difficulties, and may

* Mr. Warington, supposing the shadow of the sun to have been thrown upon a flight of steps, explains the occurrence by a change of level effected by an earthquake.

become the parent of many more. But no view of inspiration which is consistent with itself, which does not absolutely surrender the credit of the volume supposed to be inspired, can relieve us from the necessity of believing that at certain crises of the world's career God did intervene in its history by the interposition of higher laws than those of the physical universe, and that by the suspension or counteraction of those lower laws He was pleased to accredit those whom He had commissioned to speak in His Name.

CHAPTER XIII.

*IS IT USELESS TO PRAY TO GOD FOR TEMPORAL
BLESSINGS?*

CLOSELY connected with the question of miracles is that of Special Providences. The two are so closely connected that it would be impossible to leave the latter question altogether untouched in these pages. A special providence has been defined above to be "such an overruling of the order of nature as may serve to manifest to mankind God's Personal care of His creatures." Of course, if miracles be impossible, special providences are so likewise. But it does not follow that if miracles be possible, special providences are also possible. For the essential character of the one is, that it should be a kind of event altogether exceptional, while the other would naturally be expected to be continually occurring.* Are we then to

* "Coincidence is a matter of degree, and varies from the lowest degree possible to the fullest and highest. In whatever degree, therefore, a coincidence may appear in the events of the world, or in the events of private life, in that degree it is a direction, to whomsoever it is evident, to see the finger of God either in public affairs or in his own, and to draw a lesson, or it may be to adopt a particular course of conduct in consequence. But it is of the nature of a miracle to give proof, as distinguished from mere surmise, of a Divine design, and therefore the most complete and decisive kind of coincidence is alone miraculous" (Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 9). The only objection to this passage is the use of the word *proof*. Attestation would be better.

regard the world as subject to continual interferences of God's Will with the natural order of events, or are we to suppose that though occasional interferences with that order may have taken place on occasions of supreme importance, the general course of God's dealings with His creatures is provided for by general laws, from which no departure is permitted? In other words, are we to look upon the many strange and unexpected occurrences, doing violence to man's ideas of probability, and to his most careful calculations, as due to the working of general laws, or to the will of a superintending Providence? The question is a very important one practically, and a few words upon it may not be amiss in these pages.

Two theories regarding history have been advanced by different schools. The one, which may be called the philosophical theory, regards all events as the result of great principles, which were sure, in the course of time, to work out their fulfilment; circumstances may accelerate or retard their advance, but that they will ultimately produce their natural results may be regarded as absolutely certain. The other, which has sometimes been called the anecdotal theory, makes the greatest events depend upon the most trifling causes. The fate of the Roman empire, it has been said, depended on the length of Cleopatra's eyelashes. The whole history of England since the Reformation has been determined by Henry the Eighth's passion for two women. Of these views there can be no doubt that as a rule the former is the more in accordance with the facts. But it fails to explain all the phenomena. The only theory which will explain them all is that of general laws, overruled by a single will. Great moral principles, at work in the world, must naturally tend to work out their own results. But when these great principles clash, as they must

often do in a world where man has rebelled against the true law of his being, their working must be controlled by an Almighty hand. And thus it is, that at certain critical periods in the world's history, individuals have been raised up, on whose character and conduct the whole event depended. Thus it depended upon a single man's courage and military skill * whether the tide of Mohammedan conquest should overwhelm Europe, or be rolled back when it threatened Christendom from the south-west as well as from the east. The whole future of England depended upon the issue of the conflict between William and Harold ; and that again upon the absence or presence of a favourable wind, and upon the fortuitous concurrence of two invasions at the same time. We may speculate, once more, what would have been the future of our country when the Spanish Armada threatened these shores, had not a storm sprung up when our countrymen had spent all their ammunition, and when all further efforts to prevent a landing must, humanly speaking, have been useless ? We may remark, again, on the strange coincidence that James II. should have quarrelled with the Pope, and Louis XIV. should have offended the province of Amsterdam,—the consistent adversary of the policy of William III.,—just at the critical moment when the fortunes of England, in her conflict with Rome and absolutism, were trembling in the balance,† and that the wind shifted at the precise moment when a change of wind was required, in order to enable William to anchor in Torbay. And to recur once more to the history of other countries, we cannot fail to be struck with the fact, already noticed, that a tempest arose just at the critical moment of the death-struggle of the Dutch for civil and religious liberty, and

* Charles Martel at the battle of Tours.

† See Macaulay's "History of England," Chap. ix.

brought relief to the beleaguered garrison of the last patriot stronghold. In cases like these, is it altogether unphilosophical to recognize the work of a Hand which rules the tempest and directs the storm? Sometimes the strange event is in answer to prayer, as when the victorious hordes of Tartars retired from the walls of Moscow without any apparent reason.* Sometimes it may be to punish the inconsistency of Christians, as when the Mohammedan Sultan invoked Jesus Christ to punish the perfidy of His disciple, and was rewarded by an unexpected and most decisive victory.† But the whole of history teems with such instances; and without the doctrine of an overruling Providence, they are not easy to be explained. The same is true in the history of individuals. The strangest deliverances from what appeared to be certain death have occurred. Not to overload these pages with details, we may select the instance of Clive, who twice attempted his life with a pistol that would not go off, and who then desisted from his attempt, under the belief that Providence, who had twice so wonderfully intervened to save his life, must have something in store for him to do. That man's genius founded our Indian empire, with what immense results for the future of the world it is impossible to say. The number of instances in which answers have been given to prayer may be exaggerated;‡ but making the utmost deduction for

* See Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," Chap. lxxv. It was an image of the Virgin which was carried in procession. But we may believe that God accepts sincere prayers, even if wrongly directed. The Russians knew only such a form of Christianity as they had been taught.

† Gibbon, "Decline and Fall," Chap. lxxvii.

‡ A curious instance is the incident which is yearly commemorated in what is called the "Lion Sermon," preached annually at the Church of St. Catherine Cree, in London. A sum of money was left by a former Lord Mayor of London, to keep in memory in this way

fanaticism and superstition, there remain a goodly number which cannot be so explained away. Are we, or are we not, to recognize in these the work of a superintending Providence, guiding circumstances and overruling laws for His own wise purposes, and in order that man should be able to discern the working of that guiding Hand?

The Scripture itself is explicit enough upon the point. It teaches us to lay all our wants before God in prayer, in full confidence that general laws are largely overruled for special purposes:—"Whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;"* "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;"† "I exhort therefore that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and all in authority, that we may lead a godly and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty;"‡ "Be careful for nothing, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."§ And the early Christians acted on this principle. When St. Peter was in prison, "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him."|| St. Paul trusts by the prayers of a Christian Church to be delivered from prison.¶ And he regards his deliverance from death, on another occasion, as owing to the prayers of God's people on his behalf.** And this depends upon the principle which is at the root of all miracles, and, it might be added, of all religion,—the doctrine of the Fatherhood of his singular deliverance from a lion when travelling in the East. Unarmed and defenceless, his only weapon was prayer. To that he had recourse, and the fierce beast gazed at him, and went his way.

* Matt. xxi. 22.

|| Acts xii. 5.

† Matt. vii. 7.

¶ Philem. 22.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 2.

** 2 Cor. . II.

§ Philip. iv. 6.

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God. There would be little advantage in Christianity, little use in prayer, unless we believe our Saviour's words, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. . . . Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."*

Nor is there anything unphilosophical in such a belief. Force, as we have seen, is, even in man's hands, a submissive instrument in the hands of Will. In Divine Hands it can scarcely be less. If we can conceive of an operator surrounded by wires converging from all directions, who can at one moment lay a city in ruins, blow an iron-clad into the air, send directions to an army to carry on the most important operations, and at almost the same time give the most trifling directions about the most insignificant matters, we can understand something of what forces and laws may be to Omnipotence. We can understand how they can be capable of the most varied applications, according to the infinite needs of humanity.

But, it is said, facts show the absurdity of prayer to God in the moment of temporal danger. "You are falling down a precipice. Do you expect God to arrest the force of gravitation at your petition, that you may not be dashed to pieces when you reach the ground? Did you ever hear of such a case?" It may be readily conceded that we do not. God does *not* suspend the laws of gravitation at our request. But this is far from settling the question. God does not, as a rule, suspend laws; He controls them. Have we never heard of a person falling down a precipice, and being rescued, as we say, by a miracle, from what appeared to be certain death? Some bush arrests his fall. Some projecting piece of rock breaks it. Can this be accident? Is it not equally

* Matt. x. 29, 31.

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true that God directs the place where the accident should happen, and directs the person to whom the accident is to happen to that place, as that He decrees that the law of gravitation should act, and that it is as much His will that the accident did not happen six inches further on, where there was no bush or rock to break the fall, as it is that the stars revolve in their orbits, or the earth attracts bodies to its surface ?* You may say, again, What can save you from

* "Suppose then (I need not say that it is no imaginary case) a person choked by a fish-bone, and so killed. Life and death, we all allow [scarcely even this at the present time], are in the hands of God. A believer would not doubt that one who dies by an accident of this kind, dies at the time and in the manner which God, in His providence, thinks best. The fish-bone is the instrument of His will. It has fixed itself in his throat by no miraculous agency, but in the ordinary course of cause and effect. But only consider for a moment the complication of causes which placed it there,—the toil of the crew of a fishing-boat some two nights before, the conditions of wind and wave which caused a fish with a bone of this particular shape to be caught [this far understates the complexity of the conditions which caused this particular fish to be caught], the demand and consequent supply which brought it to a town some hundred miles from the sea, the little circumstances [here again we come across a perfect network of hidden causes] which led to the purchase in the town of this individual fish, and a hundred other points of detail ; such as the light by which the dinner was eaten, the exact degree of hardness or softness of the fish, as dependent upon the precise manner of cooking, even the power of contractility in the eater's throat, which may again have depended on his general health, or on the bracing and relaxing state of the atmosphere. Vary but one of these conditions, and the same result would probably not have happened. And perhaps a medical man could not be found till too late, and his absence was caused by the illness of another patient, itself dependent upon causes equally obscure. Could you blame any one who, having first accepted the truth that death in this case happened according to the providence of God, saw His finger also in every circumstance which had led to it, and attributed them all to His will ?" (" Dialogues on Divine Providence," p. III.)

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a falling rock? It must obey the laws of gravitation. True; but if it misses you by six inches—if the instinct of self-preservation has carried you just beyond its reach, by whose decree was it that you were not six inches nearer, or from whence did the impulse come that gave you the superhuman energy which enabled you to save yourself? This is no question of the action of one force, but of many. And we have already seen that Force is but the obedient handmaid of Will.

Whether in God's ordinary government of the world, or in the extraordinary events by which He thinks fit occasionally to interrupt it, it is impossible to say that the operation of any force is suspended for a moment. It may be so; but all that we can be certain of is that its action is modified by some other force, so that it does not produce precisely the effects which it would have produced without such modification. While, therefore, miracles take place only occasionally, and for the purpose of attesting the mission of some teacher sent by God, special providences may not unreasonably be believed to take place constantly, and may serve to convince man of the existence of a superintending Providence. What then? it may be asked. Do you believe that it is reasonable to ask God, for instance, to suspend the law of gravity for your convenience? Certainly not, we reply. With what reason, then, it may be again urged, do you teach men to pray, if you admit that the laws of nature cannot be suspended? The answer, if it does not demonstrate the existence of special providences, at least proves that they cannot be shown to be impossible. We do not ask God to alter His laws where His Will is clearly indicated. To do so would be disobedient and presumptuous. But where no such indications exist, *there*, we contend, prayer is legiti-

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mate and reasonable. There exist a vast number of phenomena in which the nice balance of conflicting forces is overruled by the Divine Intelligence and Will for the benefit of mankind. That, and that alone, is the sphere of prayer. If there be any moral government of the world,—and it is not yet proved that there is none,—punishments are the sign that God's will and man's have come into collision, and prayer is at least a step towards making them one again. This view may of course be rejected as not having been logically demonstrated. But it is very difficult to get a good working theory of the universe on any other. If the universe be not morally governed, it is hard to see why anything in it should be so. And if there be no morality, why should there be any morals? The only safe ground for the distinction of right and wrong is the existence of One in whom the first is inherent, and from Whose laws the second is a departure. And if He exist, then must He govern the world. He must encourage submission and punish disobedience. And He must, of course, let men see that He does so. Men must be able to trace His overruling hand in the events of life. And since prayer, when sincere, is the proof of submission to His will, He must make it clear that He answers prayer.

Thus miracles are, after all, only a particular case of a general law, depending upon the fact of God's moral government of the world. Special providences belong to another and larger class of such cases. The former are necessary to reveal God's will to us, the latter to assure us of His continual care. Whatever speculative difficulties there may be in realizing the existence of a Being who controls Himself, overrules His own laws, subjects them in a sense to the will of beings inferior to Himself, are difficulties inherent in the nature of the human mind, which invariably

lands itself in contradictions when it attempts to reduce the infinite to language. But if it be true that the universe is not a machine, but a kingdom ; that God is not a law, but a Law-giver ; that man is not an aggregate of forces, but a living soul, formed for the purpose of doing good and resisting evil, then we shall expect to find the personal relations, or, which is the same thing, the moral relations of God and man, to override all others, and everything in this world made subservient to the great object of perfecting man in obedience and love

CHAPTER XIV.

WHY HAVE MIRACLES CEASED?

THERE remains one class of objections to miracles of a practical kind, which is not without its influence in hindering belief. You tell us, men say, that from the beginning of the world to the coming of Christ, miracles have been wrought. You relate to us something very like a miraculous history of Noah. You ask us to believe in a history of Abraham full of prodigies. If the life of Isaac present none to us, we have Jacob wrestling with an angel, and have a miraculous lameness inflicted in consequence.* Joseph is visited by miraculous dreams, and endowed with a miraculous power of expounding dreams.† The departure of the Israelites from Egypt is a tissue of miraculous occurrences. Under Joshua, the Jordan dries up, and the walls of Jericho fall at the blast of the trumpet. The careers of Gideon, Manoah, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, are all marked by prodigies. If there be a cessation for some centuries after this, a fresh crop of wonders commence with Christ and His Apostles. And then the miraculous power suddenly ceases. What is the reason of this? If God really controls the powers and laws of nature, why

* Gen. xxxii. 25.

† Gen. xxxvii., xl., xli.

does He not manifest this control as much now as He did in old time? If we saw continual interruptions in the observed order of nature—if it were God's continued practice to authenticate the voice of His servants, by giving them power over nature, we should have no difficulty in believing what we read in Scripture. What we cannot understand is, why God, after having for thousands of years carried on the government of the world on one set of principles, should suddenly alter His method, and govern it after another. Either miracles form a part of His ordinary government of the world, or they form no part of it whatever. But to tell us that the world was ruled for four thousand years by the aid of miracles, and also that for the last eighteen hundred years this system has been altogether given up, is to require us to believe that God is inconsistent with Himself.

We reply, in the first place, that the very statement of this objection carries its own refutation upon the face of it. We have already observed* that miracles are not ordinary, but extraordinary events. It is admitted that we hear nothing of miracles (if the translation of Enoch be excepted) for the first seventeen hundred years or more of the earth's history. The story of the Deluge must be admitted to be a historical fact in its main features, since it appears in the traditions of nations the most widely divided on the earth's surface. But it may have happened through natural causes. The only miraculous part of the narrative is the intimation to Noah that a deluge was at hand. The miracles that encircle the career of Abraham are explainable upon the hypothesis that his life was a turning point in the world's history, and that he was specially selected by God for a mighty work. It is admitted that the portion of the history of Isaac, Jacob,

* Chapter x,

and Joseph, and the patriarchs, unexplainable by natural causes, is small indeed. If the miraculous revives in the history of Moses, it will hardly be denied that the Exodus and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai were events which have had an effect altogether incalculable upon the history of after ages. The same may be said of the conquest of Palestine under Joshua. The prodigies related of Gideon and Manoah rest upon less strong evidence than those we have already mentioned. But it may fairly be contended that, in the then condition of Israel, some visible signs of the Divine Presence and guidance may have been needed to restore the drooping spirits of Israel, and keep alive the knowledge of God among a people whose faith was weak. The prodigies related of Samuel may be explained without any reference to the miraculous, unless we except his prophetic gifts; and these belong to the domain, not of miracles, but of prophecy.* From that period to the time of Elijah and Elisha we meet with no prodigies. But the time of Elijah and Elisha, as we have already seen,† was a critical one in the fortunes of the Israelitish people. The same may be said of the time of Isaiah. If manifestations of Divine might occurred in the time of the captivity, the answer again is a reasonable one. It was necessary to convince the victorious monarchs that their victories occurred by the permission of Almighty power, and not by any superiority of the false gods of Babylon to the Lord of heaven and earth. And it was equally necessary to teach the Jews beyond the possibility

* Unless we except the sign of thunder, 1 Sam. xii. 17, 18. The miracle here was not the thunder-storm, but its coming when Samuel prayed for it. Even then it is doubtful whether we are to regard it as a miracle or as a special providence.

† See above, pp. 110, 119.

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of doubt the same truth; nor is it easy to see how, without such intervention, they could have retained their faith in a Lord who had apparently forsaken His people. But this purpose once achieved, we hear no more of miracles for five hundred years. And when we meet with them again, it must be admitted that, on the Christian hypothesis, the occasion was worthy of their re-appearance. If it were really the fact, as the Christian religion teaches, that the Eternal Word of God took human nature upon Him in the person of Jesus Christ, such an event was no ordinary one in the history of the world. On the contrary, it was one which is and must remain altogether without precedent. That unusual occurrences should signalize an event so unparalleled can hardly be a matter of surprise. Nor, as has been shown, is it easy to devise any method, beside that of miracles, whereby He could demonstrate Himself to be what He professed to be. The miracles, then, which accompany Christ's mission, are not only intended to mark an extraordinary occasion, but are also the only means of which we can conceive whereby the occurrence of this extraordinary event could be signified to those whom it was intended to affect.

In the next place, as we have seen, it is not universally admitted that miracles *have* ceased. If sufficient evidence were brought forward of the occurrence of a miracle, we should be bound, upon our own principles, to admit that it had occurred. Miracles have been God's means of making His will known to those whose spiritual knowledge is at a very low ebb. There have been times, even since Christ's coming, when man's corruption had so obscured His message, that it may have needed men armed with supernatural powers to re-enforce it. Times of spiritual declension, even under the Christian dispensation, may

have needed their Elijah and Elisha. And though the miraculous will still remain an exceptional phenomenon, yet still we cannot assume its cessation. Into this question we will not now further enter. We have discussed the evidence for and against post-Christian miracles already.* All we need to do here is to raise a protest against treating a question as settled which is still *sub judice*.

Our next point is, that if miracles had ceased with the coming of Christ, there would be nothing surprising in the fact. Miracles are an extraordinary method of making God's will known to mankind. They would naturally continue to occur occasionally as long as God had anything particular to communicate. As soon as God's Will was fully made known, they might very naturally cease. Now Christianity, we find, is God's final message to mankind. God sent His Son when the fulness of time was come.† He spoke to earlier ages "at sundry times and in divers manners," but to the last ages He spoke by His Son.‡ When God Himself became man, the revelation would, of course, be a final one. In fact, we are distinctly told that there is not to be another.§ And therefore the necessity for miracles may not unreasonably be contended to have ceased. Henceforth, it may be argued, there is sufficient light for man to walk by. God has ever displayed a strict economy of means to ends. No law has ever been overruled except by an imperious necessity of higher law. To *this* law of God, we have seen, His Son strictly conformed Himself.|| And thus it might naturally enough happen, that when the good tidings of salvation through Christ was fairly launched in the world, the dispensation of miracle and portent would cease, and

* In Chapter xii.

§ Gal. i. 8, 9.

† Gal. iv. 4; Heb. ix. 26.

|| Above, p. 33.

‡ Heb. i. 1, 2.

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the truth of God make its way in the world by its own inner momentum.

This argument will be strengthened when we come to consider the nature of Christianity. It is not merely an authoritative communication to man of certain facts, it is also a system of training for higher things. Its object is to bring out the faculties which conduce to the perfection of man's nature. And thus, when God has set before man the amount of evidence which He considers best fitted to effect that object, He withdraws all those external supports which have been necessary before. That in the infancy of mankind supernatural assistance may have been required which is now no longer needful, is by no means an unreasonable supposition. For we must dismiss from our minds such conceptions of our first parents as we derive from the *Paradise Lost*. So far as Scripture, or science, or history tells us, man's knowledge at first was of a very rudimentary character. He differed from the savage only in this, that sin had degraded neither his bodily, his mental, nor his spiritual condition. His life, no doubt, was long, his intellect active to a degree which we can hardly now conceive, his spiritual perceptions keen. But with all this, he needed some external support to re-enforce those spiritual perceptions which advanced, from phenomena without and instincts within, to the idea of a God. He needed this support still more when the rapid degradation of mankind, combined with the absence of any kind of revelation,* seemed likely to sweep away all true conceptions of God from the earth. But when once the full revelation of God in Christ was set

* It is a pure assumption to suppose that any *special* revelation was given to Adam, or to Noah, or to any one before Abraham. When we are told that God spake to Adam or Noah, we are not told how He spake.

before the world, sufficient light was given to those who chose to walk by it. Whether they would choose to do so or not was part of the system of probation which even natural religion shows this world to be. The acceptance or rejection of revealed truth, upon such evidence as God sees fit to give, is the appointed test of man's desire to do right or to do wrong. The withdrawal of miracles, from this point of view, is quite consistent with Christianity and with history. Miracles were a means in the moral and religious education of the world. When that education had been brought to a certain point, such rudimentary methods might be dispensed with, and others suited to a more advanced stage of spiritual growth might be substituted. In fact, miracles and the Law of Moses, from this point of view, stand upon precisely the same footing. Each was a "schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ."* And when that object was attained, the schoolmaster was no longer necessary.† We have been "under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father."‡ And being now "no more servants, but sons," we have no need to be "enslaved" any longer to "the weak and beggarly elements" which before were required. §

And there is another point of view from which this question must be regarded. It is essential to bear in mind that Christianity is not only a *final*, it is a *sufficient* system of training. If visible miracles be withdrawn, it is because we live under the dispensation of the Spirit. The Spirit of Christ, infusing into mankind the perfect humanity of Christ, is the necessary element by which the sanctification of each member of Christ's Church is brought about. Every individual therefore, under the Christian scheme, stands in

* Gal. iii. 24.

† Gal. iii. 25.

‡ Gal. iv. 2.

§ Gal. iv. 7, 9.

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the closest personal relation with God become man, unless he is resolved to withdraw himself from that relation. We have not gone so far as to contend that no miracle, since the coming of Christ, however strongly attested, is to be believed. But even had we done so, our position would not be so logically indefensible as has been supposed. So far from there being any contradiction or absurdity in supposing miracles to have ceased with the proclamation of the Gospel, the contradiction or absurdity, it might not unfairly be argued, is in the opposite direction. If the indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the Christian's heart be a first principle of Christianity, if the Spirit of God be ready to lead into all the truth every one who will submit himself to His guidance, if the only condition for obtaining such guidance is a willingness to be led by Him, there can surely be no further need for the miracles of old time. If it be further asked why, on this hypothesis, miracles were ever necessary at all, why God did not give His Holy Spirit to man on such terms from the beginning, we may fairly reply that on such a subject we are not competent judges: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world."* But they are not necessarily known unto man. We must be content to recognize the fact of His education of His creatures. The reasons on which it is founded we possibly should be unable to understand if they were communicated to us.

Or we might put the argument in another form. Since the supernatural is the predominant element in the Christian life, it might be said that miracles, instead of being withdrawn, have been rendered universal. The whole life of every Christian is a miracle. It comes from sources altogether outside the visible or the natural. In the place of

* Acts xv. 18.

the turning water into wine, the feeding the five thousand, there is now a continual infusion of the Divine Spirit into the human heart. In the place of the healing the sick and raising the dead there is a constant healing of moral disorders, a constant revival of the spiritual nature of man. In the place of the Resurrection of Christ, we have the communication of that Resurrection by the power of the Spirit to all who believe in Him. Thus Christianity is itself a standing miracle. Supernatural processes are continually at work, overruling the natural forces of this lower world. The only difference is that these processes are not directly visible to our senses, and can only be inferred by their most undeniable results upon the character of mankind.

Lastly, we may remark that the absence of such miracles as were worked by Christ and His followers is compensated for by other evidence. In the infancy of the Gospel we could not point to any other evidence than the miraculous,* except prophecy. We could not point to the conduct of the Apostles. We could not point to the extraordinary spread of Christianity in spite of the most adverse influences. We could not point to the remarkable contrast between the lives of Christians and the lives of other men in the days of its first propagation, nor could we ask from what source this marvellous inward influence was derived. We could not adduce the complete change of feeling which has passed over mankind since the first preaching of Christianity, in the conception of duty towards the sick, the weak, and the poor, the establishment of hospitals, workhouses, penitentiaries, the mitigation of our penal code, the innumerable institutions for the benefit of suffering or erring humanity. We could make no reference to that power of converting sinners

* See above, pp. 107, 113-115.

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which is almost unknown outside the sphere of the Gospel. We could not speak of that intense belief in Christ, which has led men to brave sorrow, suffering, torture, death, for the sake of His Name, and which it is a pure assumption to ascribe to an unreasoning, bigoted, and superstitious persuasion, since it may far more reasonably be ascribed to the influence of an ascended Word of God, who promised when He left this earth to send His Spirit into it, to convince men that though He no longer was visible on earth, yet He reigned there still. In the place of miracles we have the practical results of Christianity,—results far more observable now, nearly nineteen centuries after the coming of Christ, than they were at first, and only to be explained, one would think, upon the principle, “Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”*

The Christian, therefore, is able to give a reason for the cessation of miracles, supposing them to have ceased, which, whether it be accepted or not, must at least be admitted to be intelligible, rational, and consistent. It does not appear that it is necessary to say more. Evidence has never converted those who refused to believe,† though it has served to remove difficulties from the minds of many who found a difficulty in believing. There is, as Pascal remarked, “sufficient light for those who want to see, and sufficient

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† Lord Bacon has an acute remark that “a miracle was never yet performed to convert atheists, because these might always arrive at the knowledge of a Deity by the light of nature.” Precisely; the evidence of miracles was never intended to convert unbelievers. It was intended for the information of those who were believers already so far as their belief went. And this may serve to explain one difficulty which has been urged against the miracles of Christ, namely, that “He would do no mighty works” in Nazareth “because of their unbelief.” See above, Chap. ii.

darkness for those who do not want to see.”* We cannot pretend to provide an answer to all objections which will be deemed sufficient by those who “hold a brief” against Christianity. All we can do is to supply a consistent and reasonable answer to such objections. We can show that Christianity, while it claims to be above reason, can never be shown to be against it; and that, in submitting to its guidance where the human intellect is confessedly unable to guide itself, men are never called upon to do violence to the laws which have been imposed upon that intellect by Him who made it.

* *Pensées*. “Caractères de la Vraie Religion,” vol. ii., p. 151 (ed. Faugère).

CHAPTER XV.

*THE PRESENT POSITION OF MIRACLES AS EVIDENCE
FOR CHRISTIANITY.*

THE considerations advanced in the last chapter lead us to state what is our precise position in reference to miracles. It may be said in reply to what has been put forward, "If we were to grant you that miracles were perfectly natural and reasonable from the Christian point of view, we do not see that your argument would be much strengthened. You would not have proved that they have actually occurred. Nor is there the least necessity that you should do so. So far from miracles being an assistance to the spread of Christianity, they have become one of its greatest difficulties. Cast miracles adrift, and you still have all the formidable arguments by which you have supported your case in the last chapter, the force of which we are ready to admit, or at least to consider. Why should you encumber your cause with an useless appendage, which only serves to bring it into contempt? Why should you place the whole tremendous scheme of a revelation from God upon the basis of the testimony of fallible men? And why insist upon miracles so strongly now, when they were not even put in the forefront of the argument by the early Christian apologists?"

Of this last question we have already disposed by antici-

pation. We have reminded the inquirer that they *were* put in the forefront by the first teachers of Christianity, but that these teachers were met at once by the question whether, miracles being admitted on all hands, they were attributable to good or evil agency. This question once decided,—and it would not be decided against Christianity,—the miracles once more came to the forefront of the argument, and proved their case. Remove the miracles, and the early Christian apologists had no support for their statements. They would have been received with universal ridicule, and must in a few short years have fallen to the ground.*

With regard to the objection that our faith, instead of resting upon the Word of God, rests upon the testimony of fallible men, we do not dispute it, so far as the *external* evidence of Christianity goes. But then Christianity does not rest upon external evidence alone. It rests upon the correspondence of the facts established by external evidence to the adaptability to the various wants, circumstances, and capacities of man which experience has demonstrated Christianity to possess. We believe that in the infancy of Christianity miracles were necessary in order to call attention to the message.† We fail to see, and no one has ever been able to point out to us, how such a revelation could otherwise have been made. We believe that miracles have now ceased just because they were no longer necessary, and because abundance of other evidence has now been accumulated to show that Christianity has come from God. Miracles, therefore, have retired into the background as arguments for Christianity, just precisely in proportion to

* See above, p. 251.

† “‘Miracles,’ says Fuller, ‘are the swaddling clothes of the infant Churches;’ and we may add, not the arguments of the full-grown” (Trench, “Notes on the Miracles,” Chap. iv., Sect. 3).

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the other evidences which have accumulated since its introduction.* But because miracles are no longer quite so necessary to us for controversial or evidential purposes in the present, it does not follow that we can begin to believe that they were equally unnecessary in the past.

Christianity, we must not forget, is a historical religion. It may be attacked boldly by assault, or men may attempt to undermine its foundations. Whatever claims Christianity has upon our acceptance now, we cannot fail to see that had Christ wrought no miracles in support of His pretensions, He would never have obtained a hearing. Christ must, when He came, have shown in some way that He was what He professed to be,—the Son of God. For what He did we are referred to history, and history tells us that He worked miracles. Consequently we are bound to tell mankind that these miracles were the methods by which He manifested His character. Men may cavil at the method, but there is no other. They may reject Christianity because the mode in which Christ made Himself known is not satisfactory to their reason; and they may do this in the face of the vast mass of corroborative evidence which has since appeared. We cannot help it; we must tell the truth. You ask us how Christ first made the power known which has since been so signally manifested in the conversion

* Without this caution, Trench's words ("Notes on the Miracles," p. 95), based on a passage in St. Augustine, may be misunderstood. He says, "It may be more truly said that we believe the miracles for Christ's sake, than Christ for the miracles' sake." This may be true enough, now that the progress and effects of the Gospel have supplied us with such an infinite amount of corroborative evidence. But this could not have been the case when the Gospel was in its infancy. And even at present the evidential value of miracles is only relatively less. Positively they have a necessary and indispensable position among the proofs of the Divine origin of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

and regeneration of the world. We have no other answer than this: He worked miracles. If you will not believe this, we have nothing more to say. We leave you to explain the spread of Christianity, its vast moral and spiritual influence upon mankind, upon the principle of the absence of miracles. Our theory has at least one merit. It accounts for the facts. As yet no other has been found which does so. Nor is this the only reason why miracles cannot be given up. They are a part of a vast supernatural system which connects itself with the whole history of the world. They are but a link in a wide network of converging evidence which centres in the one fact of the Incarnation of the Word. We start with a belief in a Personal God, who can overrule the forces at work in the world as He sees fit. We believe that He has continually overruled those forces for sufficient reasons. We believe that the way He made His will known to the Jewish nation of old was by means of departures from the usual order of the world, brought about at His command. We find, side by side with miracles, a system of prophecy, as entirely a part of the supernatural order as miracles themselves. Making all deductions for difficulties, obscurities, strained interpretations, and the like, there remains the as yet unexplained fact that prophecies of Jesus Christ are in existence, written demonstrably before the event, and understood to have been so written, which no amount of ingenuity can explain away, or torture so as to make them apply to any one else. Prophecy is one of the evidences of Christianity, and one of the most convincing. But if we are to get rid of miracles because we cannot believe that any order exists capable of controlling the natural order, we must reject prophecy as absolutely as miracles. And then we must face the task of explaining how those prophecies arose, and how they are to be interpreted—a difficult one,

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as experience shows. Again, the law of Moses, which claims to have had a miraculous origin, contains a legal and sacrificial system which plainly refers to Jesus Christ—a significance not fully understood until He came. Such institutions as the Passover, the scape-goat, the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, received their full significance only when Jesus Christ came to unfold to us their meaning—when He announced Himself as the food of the soul, as He on whom our sins were laid, as the great Intercessor of His people. Here, again, we must either accept or explain away the extraordinary fact that the life, death, and triumph of Jesus Christ were foreshadowed by a whole system of mysterious rites for thirteen hundred years. Nor is this all. If we are to get rid of miracles, we must get rid of the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Ascension of Christ; in fact, of the whole Christian scheme altogether. Christianity is interpenetrated with miracle, and miracle is indissolubly bound up with Christianity. Miracle, as an *evidence*, may have retired into the background, now that its place has been so amply supplied by other proofs. Miracle, as a *fact*, cannot be so dispensed with. Without the doctrine of a supernatural order capable of modifying the action of things visible at its will, Christianity must cease to exist. It is inseparably connected with the history of One who “did many mighty works, for God was with Him,”* and who was “declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.”†

* Acts x. 38.

† Rom. i. 4.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF THE MIRACULOUS.

IN the last chapter we referred to an objection against miracles, that in the present condition of human thought they were rather a hindrance than a help to the Christian cause. The answer then given was rather argumentative than practical. It was contended that though now Christianity was able to appeal to other classes of evidence, and that this threw the miraculous to a certain extent into the background, it still remained as true as ever, that miracles alone could have given sufficient weight to the teaching of the first preachers of Christianity to enable them to overcome the antecedent improbability of their message; for the mere inculcation of the principles of morality formed only a secondary feature of their system. The message they proclaimed was inherently miraculous in itself. They spoke of God incarnate in the flesh, of a second creation of humanity in Jesus Christ, of the infusion of that new humanity into mankind through the Spirit of the Father and of Christ, and of the regeneration of the individual, and ultimately of the world at large, through this means and it alone. It was this extraordinary doctrine which imperatively required the evidence of miracles to support it. Had the Apostles simply proclaimed a system of morality, had they taught that men ought to be wise, just,

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temperate, chaste, honest, frugal, and the like, they would have needed no miracles to induce a general assent to their words.* But they would only have been teaching the world what it knew before. Maxims of morality were plentiful enough through all the ages.† What was needed was the power to carry them into effect. And this was precisely what Christianity professed to supply. The method of supply depended upon two fundamental principles—first, that of a superintending Providence, ordering all things after the counsel of His own will, for the benefit of the sentient beings whom He had created; and, next, that of the Incarnation of God the Son, in order to supply sufficient motive power for the restoration of a world which had been corrupted through sin.

Each of these principles has a most immediate bearing on the life of mankind. The doctrine of a superintending Providence, bringing His personal and tender care to bear on the most trivial affairs of life, is one the practical moment of which cannot be overrated. It does violence to no law of nature. It does but demand a belief in the subordination of law to law, by a system of delicately poised counteracting forces, until we at last arrive at the source of

* This was the great weakness of the apologists of the last century. They looked upon Christianity as an “authoritative republication of natural religion,” and upon miracles and prophecy as the evidence of the authority. But they forgot that the supernatural element in Christianity was an essential part of its actual working.

† We have seen in M. Rénan’s “Hibbert Lectures” an attempt to put the morality of Marcus Aurelius on a level with that of the Gospel. Even had this been the case, which is hardly demonstrated, it still remains true that the system of Marcus Aurelius is utterly destitute of the vital energy which has distinguished that of Jesus Christ. The Christian explanation is, at least, worthy of consideration, that this vital energy is the humanity of Christ communicated to us by His Spirit.

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all, in the Will of the Great Ruler of all.* It does but demand that this Will of the Creator shall be admitted to have more respect to moral and personal than to mere physical necessity. Remove this belief, and you at once produce the most immense results on conduct. Nothing more clearly illustrates the mysterious connection between faith and practice, so constantly discussed, than its influence here. Bring back the Stoic doctrine of a rigid necessity, and you re-introduce coldness, severity, indifference to pain, among prosperous men ; a sullen despair, and the practice of suicide, among those in adversity. The only check to this last frightful practice, in the case of the Stoic, is the doubt whether it were better

“To bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.”

No considerations of faith, affection, duty to a higher power, enter into the matter at all. All is decreed by destiny. It is useless to remonstrate, hopeless to pray, ridiculous to suppose that a loving Being is training us by the endurance of suffering into the likeness of Himself. And so, by a not uncommon inconsistency, the sufferer takes the determination of his fate into his own hands, and hopes to find in another world a deliverance, be that deliverance what it may, from evils in this, which he is resolved no longer to endure. On the other hand, if we re-introduce the listless Deity of the Epicureans, we as inevitably introduce the spirit of *poco-curantism*. Right and wrong are practically effaced from the Epicurean's creed. He may do what he pleases, for no Supreme Being will deign to notice what he does. And thus the pursuit of pleasure, variously defined according to the habits or temperament of the man, becomes the

* See Professor Baden Powell's expression quoted above, p. 52.

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substitute for the discharge of duty. Christianity alone can harmonize the conflicting claims of duty and love. Christianity alone can show us how true pleasure is inseparable from doing the will of God. So true is it, that "he that will be saved" from error and from evil, "must thus think of God," as He is revealed in His Holy Word.*

This view of the case involves the question of special providences as well as miracles. If two men, the one a so-called philosopher, the other a Christian, are suddenly and surprisingly delivered from what appeared to be certain death, the one will get up and walk coolly away, without a thought of gratitude in his heart, and speculate philosophically upon the "causes" and "laws" at work in his escape; the other will fall down on his knees and return thanks to the Almighty Father for His deliverance, and resolve, in a spirit of overpowering gratitude, to devote himself henceforth more thoroughly to his Father's service. It may be disputable which of the two be the best reasoner; it can hardly be disputed which of the two will show the best practical result from his belief.

Nor will it be just to argue that this is only a special case, and that, on the whole, the creed of the philosopher is more beneficial to society than that of the Christian. The direct opposite is the fact. No convictions have ever wrought so much benefit to humanity as the sense of obligation, of affection, of gratitude. The history of philanthropy is almost exclusively the history of the working of the principle of gratitude and love to God. That principle has stirred men to deeds of self-sacrifice of which they would otherwise have been incapable. The vast change which has taken place in the condition of mankind, of which mention has already been made,† is due entirely to this cause.

* Athanasian Creed.

† See above, p. 167.

In later days, its operation, instead of being restricted, has been enlarged. Lives like those of Howard, of Wilberforce, of Elizabeth Fry, and of others now living, whom we need not mention more particularly, show that it is still actively at work. The case of many ministers of religion is a most striking exemplification of it. What other motive has induced men to devote their whole lives, for a scanty pittance, and in many cases for none at all, to labour among the poorest and most degraded in our large towns, to the sacrifice of pleasure, comfort, and if not always of life itself, at least of all that might be supposed to make life desirable? * The moral grandeur of this self-devotion is heightened when we think that it is prompted, not merely by pity for physical distress, but by a faith in an unseen world and its Unseen Ruler. The result of such lives of self-devotion is incalculable. The late Archbishop of Canterbury recently said,† that had it not been for the fund raised by Bishop Blomfield to arrest the spiritual destitution of the metropolis, and for the labours of the clergy whom that fund provided with a bare maintenance, London might ere this have become as demoralized as ancient Babylon or Rome. That this is not the case is due to the effect of the feeling of gratitude, impelling men to labour for Him Who, they feel, has done all for them. How would the world fare if by the exertions of our philosophers this feeling of gratitude were extinguished? And this feeling of gratitude, be it remembered, is excited by the belief in a superintending Providence capable of controlling the forces of the universe according to His will.

Another doctrine which has an immense effect upon the

* See the Life of the Rev. Charles Lowder, of St. George's-in-the-East.

† Speech on behalf of the Bishop of London's Fund, 1882.

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human mind for good, is the doctrine of eternal life for those who are united to Christ. This doctrine, again, has miracles for its basis. It depends for its recognition upon the Resurrection alone. It possesses no other guarantee. "If Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain, and your faith also is vain," said the Apostle.* "Destroy the Resurrection," he said in effect, "and you destroy our hopes of eternity." Now whatever modern Positivists may say, we may join issue with them on this point. We may declare that, however exalted their moral teaching, there is not sufficient motive force to enable men to carry it out, unless it is supported by the hope of a future life. Look at Buddhism for example, the only creed we know which rejects the supernatural. To what glorious deeds for humanity has their doctrine of Nirvana, or annihilation, as the highest good, prompted mankind? Intellectual stagnation, degrading superstition, the most revolting personal austerities,† are the chief outcome of a creed which eliminates the life to come. And whatever high-flown theories enthusiasts may devise, facts are too stubborn for them. The only result of removing the hope of a future life from among the motives that may actuate humanity, so far as we can learn by experience, is the reducing mankind to a dreary hopelessness, a profound depression of heart and spirit, which robs

* 1 Cor. xv. 14, 17.

† Travellers have told us of men who have sat for years holding flower-pots in their hands, until their nails have curled round them; of men who have kept their hands clenched till the nails have grown through them; of men who have slept on a surface studded with nails, until their skin became as thick as an elephant's hide. Such austerities did at one time invade the Christian Church, as in the case of the Stylites, and other similar enthusiasts. But the Christian Church has flung off such practices as excrescences on her system.

them of that energy which alone can impel them to deeds for the benefit of mankind.

A third conviction, which once more derives its vitality from the miraculous, is the principle of sacrifice for sin. This is indissolubly bound up with the fact of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Whatever may be the difficulties connected with the doctrine of Propitiation,—and this is not the place to discuss them,—it is clear that without this doctrine a religious system is incomplete. Take Mohammedanism as an example. It holds the doctrine of a superintending Providence. It is grounded on the hope of a future life. But the one palpable blot on its system is the minimising of sin. The Divinity is represented as a good-natured Being who will not press mankind too hard. He knows what man's nature is, and that it is impossible to expect too much from it. And so, because it is impossible to raise mankind to the level of the Divine, God is willing to lower His requirements to the level of the human. Thus, instead of a system of pure and exalted morality, Mohammedanism assumes the form of a concession to human infirmity, which leaves humanity, in some of its worst aspects, precisely as it found it. The results of such a system are not far to seek. They are to be seen in the moral paralysis of every Mohammedan people, in a degradation more rapid and more complete than has assailed any other religion which has taken a wide hold on mankind. Contrast it with Christianity, which combines the utmost amount of tenderness to the offender with the most intense abhorrence of the offence, and you cannot fail to be struck with the superiority of the latter. Yet the exquisite balance of conflicting principles, which Christianity presents, can only be maintained by a due recognition of the true nature of sin. The true significance of the sacrifice of Christ

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must be looked for in this direction. It is not represented in Scripture as consisting simply in a satisfaction of the wrath of an offended Deity, borne by a substitute in the place of the real offender.* It is rather a recognition by One, who in every way could claim to represent mankind, of the true nature of sin, and of all its dire effects. Sin was so vast a departure from man's normal state that nothing but death could be its proper penalty. No man could satisfy the requirements of God's justice if he failed to recognize that truth. That Jesus, as man, recognized that truth ; that He, by His life and death, satisfied all the claims which a righteous God could make upon humanity ; that, these claims once satisfied, there existed no reason why men, once delivered from the bondage of corruption, should not henceforth enjoy the incorruptible life that dwelt in Him,—these were the conditions of the Atonement. But they derive all their power from the fact that God and man were united in the person of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of sacrifice for human sin involves the hypothesis of an invasion by the highest laws of the spiritual universe into the region of this visible world. And the practical results of the doctrine are, as we have seen, that it produces the strongest possible abhorrence of sin, while it inflicts the smallest possible distress upon the offender. It removes from him that sense of desperation which drives men to the commission of the most terrible crimes. But it leads him to find reparation for his misdeeds, rather by the frank confession of his fault, by the attempt to realize his guilt, by the sincere endeavour after amendment, by identifying himself for the future with the mind and spirit

* Almost all the difficulties which have beset the doctrine of the Atonement have sprung from this one-sided way of stating it, and not from the words of Scripture itself.

of the Redeemer in reference to evil, than by any cruel penances, any prolonged self-torture, or, on the other hand, by any inadequate conceptions of the gravity of his offence.

The last point to which we shall refer in this connection is the practical influence of the doctrine of the Incarnation upon the condition of mankind. The Incarnation is itself a miracle, according to the definition of miracles with which we commenced. Professor Baden Powell's idea, to which reference has already been made, of a "moral and spiritual revelation" adapted to the moral and spiritual needs of man, may be a very sound one, but it is utterly inapplicable to Christianity. For Christianity depends upon the Incarnation. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us," * is a declaration that stands in the very forefront of the Gospel. And the Incarnation is not merely a moral and spiritual, it is also a physical fact. It is an invasion of the visible universe by the moral and spiritual order; it is an influence exerted upon the whole composite nature of man. Were it only a moral influence, it might lead, nevertheless, as we have seen, to material results.† But inasmuch as it claims to have redeemed and sanctified the animal and material portion of man's being, its interference with the order of nature is even more widely extended still. It is, however, with the moral rather than with the material aspect of the question that we are now chiefly concerned. Our business is with the extraordinary change which the miracle of the Incarnation has wrought in the position and prospects of man. Positivism has stood forward of late as the champion of human nature. It styles itself the "religion of humanity." It has loudly proclaimed the inability of Christianity to grapple with the problems that concern mankind most nearly. Mr. Frederic Harrison, the most

* John i. 14.

† Page 29.

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eloquent expositor of the new gospel of Positivism, has arraigned Christianity* as "turning with a frown and a sigh from all the rest of human story" but that which is connected with Jesus Christ. A "retrograde theology," he complains, strives "to force us back upon a petty and partial conception of man's nature," while "Positivism attempts to deal" with the complex problems of human life "by the light of *all* the essential characteristics of human civilization." We retort the objection upon the objector. It is Positivism which seeks to force on us a "petty and partial conception of man's nature."† It is Christianity alone which embraces all the various characteristics of man's being.‡ Only in utter ignorance of the facts can the assertion be made that Christianity ignores human progress in any age and race. "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him," was

* In the *Nineteenth Century* for October 1880.

† "Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret." Positivism seeks to stifle those aspirations after the eternal, the infinite, the mysterious, to overthrow that sense of weakness, of dependence, of subordination to Almighty power and love, which have been the source of the loftiest actions of man. A nature thus cramped in its highest aspirations will take its revenge somehow.

‡ "A deification of humanity upon its own grounds, an exaltation which is all height and no depth, wants power because it wants truth. It is not founded upon the facts of human nature, and therefore issues in vain and vapid inspiration, and injures the solidity of man's character. That serious doctrine of man's greatness, which lays hold on man's moral nature, and brings it out, is one which lays its foundation first in his guilt and misery; his exaltation is remedial, a restoration from a fall. Thus the school of experience accepts man's vileness in the Gospel portrait, the sanguine school his loftiness; the one depresses man, the other inflates him; the Gospel doctrine of the Incarnation and its effects alone unites the sagacious view of human nature with the enthusiastic" (Mozley, "Bampton Lectures," p. 194).

St. Peter's first remark to the Gentile converts.* "These having not the law, are a law unto themselves," is the philosophy of Gentilism which commended itself to St. Paul. Hellenic philosophy, as well as Jewish theology, was held by the great school of Christian philosophy at Alexandria in the third century to be one of the great factors in human progress. Nor can it be said in the nineteenth century that heathen culture is unduly decried in the Christian Church. Our theologians are foremost in the recognition of the services which men like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have rendered to humanity. Christian teachers vie with one another in their admiration of that respect for law which was the noblest characteristic of ancient Rome. Men in the highest position in our Church have been proud to be numbered among the historians of Greece and Rome.† There was never a greater calumny against Christianity than to represent it as indifferent to the interests of mankind. So far is this from being the case, that a recent writer, by no means too devoted to Christianity, has described it as the "enthusiasm of humanity."‡ The phrase might be improved upon, but the fact cannot be disputed. The Incarnation of Christ introduced into the world quite another conception of the dignity of humanity to any that had obtained before. It gathered up, and gave fresh point to, all the higher aspirations of man's being. It told him that his life was not confined to the uncertainties

* Acts x. 35. It is remarkable that St. Peter represents this truth as now dawning upon him for the first time. He, like other Jews, had quite misconceived the utterances of their own prophets, till Jesus Christ came to give fresh force to the saying, "*Homo sum, nihil humani a me alienum puto.*"

† As, for instance, the late Bishop Thirlwall, the historian of Greece, and Dr. Merivale, the present Dean of Ely, the historian of Rome,

‡ "*Ecce Homo.*"

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and miseries of this present state of existence. It gave him a hope of being something more than a feeble shadow of his former self in the interminable future.* To be the friends of the Incarnate God was no light privilege for mortal men.† That He should go hence to “prepare” for each of them one of the “many mansions” which existed for them in His Father’s house was a greater honour still.‡ The idea of a general resurrection, in which those who had lived according to His will on earth should inherit a kingdom of which the God-Man should be the Head, and in which they should ever dwell with Him,§ opens out a vista of possibilities exceeding the wildest dreams in which man had heretofore indulged. And the vision of the future which displayed itself to the writer of the Apocalypse exhausts all the powers of the imagination in the attempt to picture the future of humanity.|| It has already been said that man’s condition would never have been raised here, were there not a prospect of its being raised hereafter. But that it has been raised here, that an altogether different notion of what is due to man *as* man is prevalent in the world to that which prevailed before Christ’s coming, cannot be denied. It is the boundless horizon of futurity that gives point and purpose to the feeble and often unsuccessful efforts of the individual, that lifts him from the narrowness and pettiness of his own particular life, and nerves him to do his own appointed work, in the certainty that by so doing he is working out the purposes of the All-wise and All-good. It

* This was the highest conception of the future state conceived of in the ancient world, save in the case of some few deified heroes.

† “Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends” (John xv. 15).

‡ John xiv. 2.

§ Matt. xxv. 34, 46; John xiv. 2, 3; 1 Thess. iv. 17.

|| Rev. xxi., xxii.

is this conception of the dignity of humanity that has abolished slavery. It has set an entirely new value upon human life. The savage ferocity that delighted in war, the cruel penal code that would sacrifice a man's life for stealing a sheep, have ceased to exist simply through the sense of the importance of a single human life in the eyes of the Creator. The increased weight of the poor in the social and political scale, the increased attention paid to their interests and rights by those above them, the desire for the amelioration of their moral, social, physical condition, may be traced to the same source. Even the movement for the extension of the suffrage (whether politically desirable or not, is not the question here) must be admitted to be due to the feeling that government should be directed towards securing the well-being of the many rather than the privileges of the few, and to a notion that then only can the well-being of the many be attained, when they themselves are allowed to take a share in the deliberations for attaining it.

Thus, then, we see that an inquiry into the reality of miracles is no barren discussion as to whether such and such events occurred or not in a bygone age, which may safely be remitted to the domain of theological archæology, but it is a question intimately bound up with the present position and future prospects of humanity. Personal affection to a Personal God is necessary in order to put the springs of self-devotion into action. A belief in Christ alone can supply the necessary motive power to keep them going.* The belief in a great Sacrifice for sin can alone

* The belief in Christ, we must remember, beside a faith in His atoning work, involves the belief in (*a*) immortality, (*b*) in the dignity of man, (*c*) in the possibility of his restoration, (*d*) in his perfectibility, and (*e*) in the certainty that no labour or effort after good can possibly be in vain, 1 Cor. xv. 58.

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prevent a man either from being overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, or from relapsing into a state of indifference to all breaches of the moral order, which do not affect his personal convenience. A sense of the dignity of humanity is required to induce men to act upon a principle, proclaimed, indeed, but seldom acted upon, before Christ came, namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." And all these doctrines rest immediately upon the doctrine of miracles as a foundation. Thus, then, instead of the miraculous being an appendage to Christianity, which may safely be detached without injury to the main fabric, it is the very core and centre of Christianity itself. It cannot be removed without shattering in pieces the whole system of Christian doctrine and practice. Men may therefore well be exhorted to think twice before they lend an ear to those who would fain persuade them to accept a Christianity without miracles. A Christianity without miracles, it is not too much to say, must ultimately resolve itself into a Christianity without Christ.

CHAPTER XVII.

MIRACLES A PART OF GOD'S ETERNAL ORDER.

MIRACLES, as we saw at the outset, are the means adopted by God of making His will known to man. Their essence consists in a modification of the order of the natural universe. We have stated our reasons for regarding it as probable, if not absolutely certain, that they have ceased to occur, now that the final revelation of God's will to man has been made. This statement, however, relates only to the present order of things, during which the regenerating process is being carried on in the world through the humanity of Christ spiritually communicated to mankind. Scripture, however, and, it might not unfairly be added, the instinct of humanity, declare that the present order of things is not, cannot be, eternal. We look for "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* Another of those breaks in the continuity of the universe, which science tells us have frequently occurred,† is destined to take place when the present order of things shall have run its appointed course. Every break in the continuity of things is in itself a miracle—an interruption, that is, in the established order for the purpose of manifesting God's will. And this—so far as we are able to comprehend the purposes of the Infinite—final dispen-

* 2 Peter iii. 13.

† See above, p. 89.

sation of God's providence will be a system of perpetual miracle. That is to say, the whole condition and course of things will be what we call supernatural. That the supernatural is even now the essential principle of Christianity we have just seen. But in the world to come it will no longer be, as now, a hidden principle, it will be revealed in all its fulness to the enlarged capacities of man. In the new heavens and the new earth the laws and arrangements of nature will be modified—so we are taught—to suit a new order of being. Man himself, though not changed in the three necessary elements of his being, spirit, soul, and body,* will have the relative proportions of these elements very considerably changed. The “spiritual body,” of which the Apostle speaks,† can hardly mean a body composed of spirit, which would be a contradiction in terms, but a body ruled by spirit, and adapted to the requirements of spirit. Since the spiritual body can only exist by the communication of the life of the Risen Lord, it must follow the conditions of His risen body. Now we find that this body, though it had manifestly many new powers, was still essentially material. He “ate and drank,” we are told, “after He was risen from the dead.”‡ The marks of His wounds were still visible.§ He called upon His disciples to touch and feel Him.|| And yet, it would seem, He had no need of food or lodging, nor, apparently, of sleep.¶ He passed through closed doors as though they were open.¶ And when He ascended into heaven, He did so, not by the dispersion of the material particles of that body, but by a

* See Heard's “Tripartite Nature of Man.”

† 1 Cor. xv. 44.

‡ Luke xxiv. 43; John xxi. 12; Acts x. 41.

§ Luke xxiv. 39; John xx. 20, 27.

|| *Ib.*

¶ Luke xxiv. 36; John xx. 19, 26.

visible ascent of it, in all its corporeal entirety, into regions beyond man's ken. There, the Christian faith teaches, that body abides still. Mysteriously present everywhere though it may be, by virtue of its personal union with the Divinity,* yet, in a material sense, its particles must remain re-united, after the manner of bodily existence, otherwise it would cease to be a body.† Such a mode of existence, we may believe, is designed for us in "the times of restitution of all things."‡ A new arrangement of the physical laws of our bodies will take place, whereby the material particles of which we consist shall be so disposed as to obey more readily than heretofore the laws of spiritual being. And to this end the laws of the natural universe will be remodelled. The present order of things shall pass away.§ Fire, we are told—and scientific researches have established the probability of this||—will be the means whereby the change shall be brought about.¶ The reconstituted world will be more amenable than the present to supernatural

* See Hooker, "Ecclesiastical Polity," Book V., 55.

† The advocates of transubstantiation, among other modes of reconciling the true humanity of Christ with His corporal presence in the Eucharist, have maintained a miraculous multiplication of those particles, after the manner of the miraculous multiplication of the five loaves and two fishes. Into these deep subjects we do not enter, beyond saying that Scripture and the dogmatic definitions of the Catholic Church have happily left other ways open to us of explaining the mysterious words of Institution of the Lord's Supper.

‡ Acts iii. 21.

§ Rev. xxi. 1.

|| Not only the subterranean fires known to exist in the bowels of the earth, but such phenomena as that to which we have already referred, the blazing out and then the extinction of stars like the one in the beautiful constellation Corona Borealis, attest the reasonableness of this prophecy.

¶ 2 Peter iii. 10, 12.

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influences. Those forces which are now dimly discerned to be breaking in fitfully, irregularly, feebly, upon the physical world, will, when the disorder in the moral and spiritual world is brought to an end, rule physical forces regularly, intelligibly, and irresistibly. The supernatural will be visibly in the ascendant. It will no longer be doubtfully gathered from occasional interruptions and uncertain indications, but the Hand of God will be recognized in everything. To this end man's capacities for comprehending the invisible will be indefinitely enlarged. He will no longer be compelled to read the unseen by means of the visible. His spiritual faculties will be sharpened to the extent of enabling him to see God directly as He is. He will no longer be compelled to view Him even through the medium of the humanity of Christ. The time will come when man sees God no longer by a mirror in an enigma,* but can behold Him face to face. And this would seem to be the meaning of those mysterious words of 1 Cor. xv. 28, "Then shall the Son also be subject to Him that hath put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."

Such is the teaching of Scripture, so far as we can piece together the dark hints it throws out concerning the future destiny of man. And it meets with a direct negative those somewhat arrogant notions of modern men of science that the Order of Nature exists by necessity, and is incapable of variation. On the contrary, the present physical order of things is but a passing phase of being. The laws of the present universe exist for a Divine purpose; and when that purpose has been fulfilled, they will be set aside. And the supernatural, that which men persist in ridiculing and

* This is the literal translation of the words of St. Paul in 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

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denying, in spite of so many and so various evidences of its existence, is the one unvarying order which will exist when all inferior systems shall have passed away. Miracles are, as it were, flashes of light upon the twilight of our present existence, bright meteors flaming across the darkened sky of our lives to tell us that "there are more things in heaven and earth than we dream of in our philosophy." This world of ours is sweeping rapidly through space until it reach a region where the higher order, which now breaks in fitful gleams upon our lower life, shall become its uniform law. From the "outer darkness" of sin and misery, "where is wailing and gnashing of teeth," this world is directing its course towards the unapproachable light. Only intermitted glimpses once of that light were permitted to dawn upon us. Now it beams with a steady if distant brightness on those who have eyes to see it. The time is coming when we shall be able to gaze with face unveiled upon Him who "is light, and in whom is no darkness at all."*

* 1 John i. 5.

CONCLUSION.

WE have now come to the end of our inquiry. We have discussed the assertion that miracles are impossible *à priori*, and have succeeded, we trust, in showing that such an assertion cannot be maintained. We next endeavoured to explain the grounds on which miracles must be regarded as essential to the establishment of the claims of the Christian religion. We contended first that some revelation of God's Will was needed; that man's condition was desperate, and required extraordinary remedies. We argued that the complex elements of man's being demanded a revelation which should appeal to man's lower as well as his higher nature; that a progress from the lower to the higher was in conformity with the usual course of nature, and that as the whole condition of man in this world is one of probation, the evidence of religion offered to him would be of such a character as to form part of such probation. And we further pointed out that inasmuch as the restoration of man's nature to a perfection which it had lost is the object of the Christian scheme, and the assumption of human nature by the Son of God was the necessary means of that restoration, it was reasonable to suppose that *if* the Son of God so became man, He would not fail to manifest the Divine power that dwelt in Him.* We next enlarged upon the special characteristics of the Bible miracles, and of the evidence for them.† We then entered at length into the evidence for the Scripture miracles.‡ Our next task was to examine into the objections which had been raised against this evidence.§ We went on to discuss the kindred

* Chap. ix. † Chap. x. ‡ Chap. xi. § Chap. xii.

question of Special Providences, which we regarded as probable manifestations of the will of a Personal Ruler of the universe.* We then entered into the reasons for the cessation of miracles, and showed that, so far from this fact constituting any presumption that they had never occurred, such cessation might, from the nature of the case, be looked for.† Our next inquiry was into the position which miracles at present hold among the evidences for Christianity. We contended that though their position was not at the present time of that paramount importance as evidence which they occupied at the beginning of the Gospel, yet that it was a mistake to suppose that they might now be disregarded—(1) because they afforded the only rational explanation of the acceptance of Christianity by mankind, and (2) because they were an integral part of a system which, from the beginning to the end of it, was essentially supernatural.‡ We then proceeded to point out the necessity of the miraculous in order to influence man's conduct;§ and we concluded by endeavouring to show that miracles, regarded as means whereby God overruled the course of nature in order to manifest His Will, so far from being purely exceptional in themselves, formed part of a supernatural order which would one day supersede the order of things under which we now live.||

To these considerations we ask the candid attention of all fair-minded men. Bishop Butler¶ remarks that "a miraculous revelation has a peculiar tendency, from the first principles of our nature, to awaken mankind, and inspire them with reverence and awe, and *this is a peculiar obligation* to attend to what claims to be so with such appearances of truth." It is often supposed that Christianity is incompatible with free inquiry. We believe, on the contrary, that from free inquiry Christianity has everything to hope, and nothing to fear. To honest doubt we have, in these pages, displayed no hostility, because we feel none.**

* Chap. xiii. † Chap. xiv. ‡ Chap. xv. § Chap. xvi.

|| Chap. xvii.

¶ "Analogy," Conclusion.

** "The question is not at all whether the evidence of religion be satisfactory, but whether it be, in reason, sufficient to prove and discipline that virtue which it pre-supposes" (Bishop Butler, "Analogy," chap. viii.)

Doubt, if it be really honest, may often prove to be the road to honest conviction,—a very different thing, be it observed, to a mere conventional acceptance of the principles of the Christian religion. But no man's doubt can be honest who will not carefully study both sides of the question. There are many professed sceptics with regard to Christianity who have never examined the evidence for it at all. They have been content to read sceptical books and sceptical articles in magazines, and have steadily refused to read anything on the other side. We often hear of those who "hold a brief" for Christianity. It does not seem to be sufficiently realized that it is possible to hold a brief on the opposite side. But this is largely done in the present day. If those who are honestly in doubt about the possibility of miracles will candidly weigh the arguments which have here been advanced, at least it may be hoped that they may thereby be induced to confess three things—first, that it is not abstractedly impossible that miracles should have occurred; next, that the evidence for their occurrence is, what every man has a right to expect it to be, far more complete than for any other historical fact or facts whatsoever; and, third, that if the Christian theory be true, and the Son of God assumed man's nature in order to repair the evil wrought by man's fall, it were only natural and reasonable to suppose that some departure from the natural order would signalize the occurrence of a fact at once so unique and so important. Thus the question at least, as Bishop Butler puts it, demands the serious attention of every reasonable man. He may not be able to satisfy himself at once of the soundness of the conclusion to which he is invited to arrive. But at least he will admit that such a conclusion is not rashly to be rejected. And when once a man sets himself in sober earnest to examine into the evidence for Christianity, when once he is persuaded to wait and weigh carefully what is put before him, we may venture to express our firm conviction that he will be convinced of its cogency in the end.

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